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#

The illusion of normality attempted by the two elder residents of Number Four, Privet Drive, was once again shattered in the early hours of the morning, much to the repeated disgust of the neighbours.

Petunia Dursley's shrill voice, again berating her nephew for his laziness, was a constant source of irritation for the otherwise fairly usual neighbourhood, especially when it occurred at the ungodly hour of six am.

Never mind that it was probably justified, since the Potter boy was verifiably lazy (proven by the lax way he wore the second-hand clothes gifted to him by his generous benefactors, and his total lack of concern at everybody's meaningful stares and less than subtle comments), six am was just too damn early to yell at somebody to start sweeping the floor, taking out the garbage, washing the car, and weeding the path.

If it wasn't for the fact Petunia and her husband were such kindly people for taking in the slack son of her deceased (and undoubtedly equally lazy) sister ten years ago, somebody would have said something to her by now.

Strangely, it never once occurred to anybody that constantly calling somebody something might actually encourage them to develop that attribute.

Luckily, lazy came up in Petunia's tirades slightly more often than freak, otherwise, this could have been a very different story.

#

"Bad news, Vernon," she said. "Mrs. Figg's broken her leg. She can't take him."

She jerked her head in Harry's direction. Not that she needed to. Vernon and Petunia rarely ever spoke of anybody else with that particular tone or emphasis.

"You could just leave me here," Harry put in, trying hard not to sound too hopeful.

He'd be able to watch what he wanted on television for a change and maybe even have a go on Dudley's computer before the fat lump of lard got bored with it and decided to see if it could fly or something as equally destructive.

At hearing Harry's suggestion, Petunia looked as though she'd just bitten into a lemon.

Actually she usually looked that way, especially when Harry was involved.

"And come back and find the house in ruins?" she snarled.

"Lock me in my cupboard then," he said with a shrug.

Getting a chance to lie down in peace and quiet for a few hours, maybe even catch an extra nap, was a close second place to watching TV or playing computer games for Harry.

Unfortunately Vernon didn't trust Harry to be alone, not with the number of times strange things happened around him.

Nobody in number four talked about the fact Harry never had to go to the trouble of getting his hair cut, or how the teachers at his school never kept him behind to write lines anymore after that incident with the suddenly blue wig.

No, Vernon did not trust Harry in the slightest to stay home and not do anything 'unnatural'.

So Harry found himself dragged to the zoo to emulate a pack mule for Dudley and his bully friend, carrying half his body weight in bags filled all the various things Petunia deemed necessary for her

Duddikins to have on hand (like 5 litres of piggy's favourite soft drink, and a home-made pie big enough to feed eight people).

He dutifully trudged along behind them, stopping to sit or lean as often as possible, as was his habit even when not loaded down with the wale's baggage. Not that Dudley could waddle for very long without a rest break anyway.

Harry leaned heavily against the glass in front of the massive reptile tank and looked longingly at the huge snake snoozing under the sun lamps.

"Lucky bugger," mumbled Harry, watching it enviously. "You get to lie around all day doing whatever you want, with no chores or school, and get all of your meals brought to you. That's a neat angle you've got going on there, aside from idiots like Dudley annoying you I guess."

The snake suddenly opened its beady eyes. Slowly, very slowly, it raised its head until its eyes were on a level with Harry's.

Then it winked.

In that instant, Harry knew the snake not only understood him, but whole heartedly agreed with him. For some reason, knowing the impressively large creature lived a life of luxury and was playing at being asleep, effectively pranking the lines of gawking humans that came to see it daily, made Harry laugh.

At least until Dudley noticed the snake had moved and came wobbling over to rough push Harry out of the way, knocking him to the ground.

In the ensuing chaos of the glass disappearing and the lard-ball falling into the shallow pool of the pen, nobody really noticed Harry apologising to the python as it patiently waited for Dudley to be 'rescued' from its cage.

"is alright, amigo," it hissed back. "Now I get a 'oliday out the back while they fix my 'ome."

Relieved, Harry realised he admired the snake's calm acceptance of the situation, and decided to try to emulate it in the future.

It was likely to be easier than fighting all the time.

#

Dudley's gang used to hunt Harry. They thought chasing him around the neighbourhood and then beating up the smaller boy was great fun, until Harry figured out running and still getting beat up was a lot more work than standing his ground and getting beat up.

He embarked on a new plan, one that he mentally dubbed 'Harry-Kari'.

It involved no longer running from the gang, but instead throwing himself at whichever one of them was closest and fighting for all he was worth for a few seconds. He would then roll up into a protective ball and take whatever was dished out until they went away.

As thick as they were, even Dudders realised they were not likely to ever have any fun chasing Harry through the streets anymore, plus Harry sometimes managed to land some quite painful blows, making them all hesitant to be the first in. So the gang of cowardly bullies eventually gave it up as a bad joke and simply stuck to insulting him from a distance.

And that was just the way Harry liked it.

#

Harry loved spending time with Mrs Figg, his half crazy babysitter from down the road.

He loved being allowed sit around for hours drinking tea and patting cats while the mad old woman went through albums of cat photos telling and retelling her stories; it was a nice, relaxing time for him. She sometimes even let him watch TV and gave him cake.

Being a human cushion for a few cats and putting up with the awful cabbage smell permeating the place was a very small price to pay for his brief stays at her house when no other sitter was available. Especially not when the hardest work she asked of him was to help refill some of the cat's bowls or brush the tangles out of their coats.

Yep, the only thing better than taking care of the cats at Mrs Figg's, was being a cat at Mrs Figg's.

#

Several days before Harry's birthday, things started to get strange. It started off normal enough though, but this was where Harry would later realise everything had started changing.

"Get the mail, Dudley," said Uncle Vernon from behind his morning newspaper.

"Make Harry get it," whined Dudley.

"Get the mail, Harry," commanded Vernon.

Harry looked up from his meagre breakfast and made a quick evaluation of everybody's mood. It all looked good.

"Okay," he said happily, knowing full and well that Vernon was aware the effort involved in forcing his will onto the boy was much more than a simple mail collection warranted. "In a minute."

Vernon glared over the paper at Harry, annoyed, but not enough to be called angry. Harry tried to ignore him, but was secretly holding his breath, because sometimes, Vernon could be bothered. The skill was in choosing when to be outright slack, and when to work, or look like he was working anyway.

"Petunia," called the obese man in a sickly sweet voice, looking away from Harry after a final disgust and hate filled glance. "Can you get the mail please, Pet?"

Harry managed to keep the smile from his face and went back to his tiny portion of food with an unnoticed sigh of relief. He would need his energy later, because despite everybody's opinion, it was hard work being 'lazy', but he did have a reputation to uphold.

Of course, if he had any inkling that there was a letter waiting for him amongst the usual pile of bills and advertisements, his reaction would have been very different.

#

Harry looked around his new bedroom and groaned. Not only was the room several times larger than his cupboard, meaning he now had a much larger area to clean and care for, it was half filled with Dudley's broken junk.

No doubt it would somehow become his responsibility to dispose of it all, meaning at least a few dozen trips to the bin with armloads of rubbish.

Maybe he should have gotten the mail after all. At least then he would have some idea why Petunia was forcing him into this room.

Then again, if he spent a bit of time fixing up some of the lesser damaged goods, and snuck them out, he might be able to flog them off at the second hand store, or to some of the kids at school.

A bit of cash would definitely take the sting out of having to lug it all down stairs.

#

Over the next few days, and despite Vernon's best efforts, the strange letters kept arriving.

Owls and envelopes flew through the house, causing chaos and confusion the likes of which Harry had never seen before.

Petunia shrieked and Vernon swore, while Dudley tried futilely to hide his enormous bulk under the rather smaller coffee table.

Harry made no effort to catch or open one of the envelopes, figuring somebody would do it eventually, and trying to defy pig-headed and stubborn Vernon in a direct confrontation about this was just wasting time and energy.

Nope, it was much better to sit back and do nothing, appearing as blameless as possible while exerting no effort at all.

Not that doing so was any sort of guarantee that he wouldn't be punished anyway, but it was easier than any other course of action he could think of.

Besides, this was just too much fun to watch.

#

Hagrid's midnight introduction at the little shack in the middle of nowhere was incredibly funny and enlightening, but Harry still managed to get back to sleep with the minimum of fuss. He had lots of lots of practice at grabbing a nap whenever possible, no matter what was going on around him, and Dudley sporting a brand new pig's tail just gave Harry something nice to recall in his dreams.

Sleeping was possibly his favourite pastime.

The next morning, Harry shared breakfast with the giant of a man before they left the Dursleys behind and headed back to land.

Settling down in the small boat, Harry was still staring at Hagrid, trying to imagine him flying, or even just riding a motorcycle, and also vaguely wondering how the Dursleys were supposed to get back to shore without their boat.

"Seems a shame ter row," said Hagrid, giving Harry a sideways look. "If I was ter - er - speed things up a bit, would yeh mind not mentionin' it to no one?"

Harry nodded happily, excited to see what else magic could do.

Hagrid pulled out the pink umbrella again, tapped it twice on the side of the boat, and they sped off toward land.

Harry's grin threatened to split his face as his mind raced faster than it had ever done before, his imagination coming up with dozens of ways where magic like this would make his life easier. He could get Dudley's bike fixed and never have to walk anywhere, or make the much-hated lawn-mower move itself around without having to be pushed. The potential was limitless, and that was just one little bit of magic.

Oh yes, he was really looking forward to Hogwarts.

#

The day spent in Diagon Alley was possibly the best day Harry could ever remember having.

Everywhere he looked there were people performing incredible acts of magic as if they were everyday things, which they probably were.

Bags and boxes floated along behind shoppers as if being carried by invisible servants, rags scrubbed and cleaned windows without a hand holding them, dishes stacked themselves precariously before flowing away into the back room of the pub, probably to be cleaned by more magic, and nobody seemed to have to make any real effort for it to all happen.

It was wonderful.

"So tell me more about what magic I'll learn," Harry asked Hagrid. "Are there spells to wash and clean clothes? What about spells to make brooms sweep the floor, like that one over there?"

Hagrid laughed, his deep booming rumble shaking several tables around them.

It was abundantly clear that Hagrid was not a limitless source of information for Harry, but he was certainly friendly enough, and Harry appreciated the effort the man had gone through for him.

It was a pity the huge guy didn't appear to have a proper wand to use magic like other people were, but since he was carrying all of Harry's newly purchased stuff, Harry wasn't too disappointed.

"Yer'll be there findin' out soon enough," said Hagrid.

"Fair enough," said Harry, "but can you at least tell me about any benefits I might be entitled to, being the famous boy-who-lived and all that?"

#

Getting fitted for what was basically a dress should have worried Harry a little, but since all the other guys would be wearing the same thing, he found he wasn't really that concerned by it, and it did mean one less thing to worry about: trousers.

It was a pity he had to share the robe shop with the moron currently trying to impress him.

"Hang, on, let me get this straight. You'd rather not learn magic than end up in a house that has a reputation you don't apparently like?"

The blonde boy Harry decided to call Slick, since his hair was immaculately slicked back with so much product that it almost gleamed, nodded.

"It would be embarrassing!" Slick proclaimed. "A disgrace."

Harry showed his best fake smile and kept his mouth closed.

Arguing with idiots was more than a waste of effort, it sometimes felt like it sapped your own intelligence. Better to slap one of Dudley's moronic smiles on his face and stop listening, lest the sheer stupidity of anything the git said somehow infected him.

At least he didn't have to worry about trousers anymore.

#

After his fifth wand, Harry was fed up with the whole time consuming process.

First 'Old Nutter' the wand maker would rummage around in his horde, shuffling through shelves until sometime in his age addled brain would inspire him to grab a wand from a seemingly random location. Then he would slowly make his way to where Harry was impatiently made to stand, waffling on about types of wood and the internal organs of whatever magical creature was sacrificed for it.

Finally he would hand the stick over to Harry and get him to give it a wave, before snatching it back almost immediately and starting the whole process over again.

The next wand Harry held shot a blast of something out, shattering a row of boxes on the far wall.

"I'll take it," he said, gripping the stick tightly.

"No!" said Olivander, trying to wrest it from Harry's hands. "It is not the right one."

"Why not? It did something pretty spectacular," said Harry, refusing to let go. "That means it's got to be okay."

He gave another tug, but was unable to free the stick. The old bugger was stronger than he looked.

"Mr. Potter, 'okay' is not good enough. This is not the right wand for you and we will keep trying until we find the correct one!"

With a sudden jerk he ripped the wand from Harry's grasp.

Harry grumbled under his breath at the smug look Olivander gave him before putting the wand back into its box and starting to rummage through the shelves again.

"Well it better not take much longer," said Harry out loud. "My legs are getting tired. Why don't you have a seat out here or something?"

"A difficult customer indeed," mumbled Olivander, reaching for a particular box he would not usually have considered so soon.

#

Harry had never concentrated on learning something so much in his life.

"Reparo!" he incanted, swishing his Phoenix feather core wand in exactly the pattern the book with the moving illustrations showed him.

There was a small flash of light, a puff of smoke, and a quiet 'bang', and then the broken model plane was once again whole.

Harry almost jumped into the air with joy.

It had taken almost a week since his trip to Diagon Alley, but he had cast his first spell successfully, and the payoff in cash for what he could now get from the second hand shop for the fixed plane was well worth the effort.

There were other spells he really wanted to learn, like the ones that could potentially shrink his humongous clothes down to something approaching his size, but money was more useful, and half of his clothes needed repairing anyway.

He was especially happy that he had managed to avoid getting all of Dudley's broken junk out of his new bedroom, since it would now be possibly to get something for it all, once fixed.

He always knew putting off chores paid off.

#

Discovering he had no idea how to find Platform nine and three quarters, Harry did the most reasonable thing he could think of. He pulled a large scrap of paper out of his trunk and wrote a hasty sign that he then held up for people passing by to read.

"Trying to find Paltform 9 3/4 – please help," it read.

Several people chuckled, and few looked at him like they were worried he had lost his mind.

One or two tossed a few coins onto the book bag he had left lying at his feet after taking out his writing materials.

Eventually a girl with extremely bushy hair stopped in front of him, hands on her hips and a stern look on her face.

"You shouldn't have that where people can see it," she admonished. "It might violate the statute of secrecy, and you spelt platform wrong."

"Wouldn't be much point if nobody could see it," he replied evenly, "and you managed to understand what I meant, so that it means its working."

"Why don't you know where the entrance is?" she asked.

"Why do you?" he countered.

"I read all about it," she said, a tone of superiority in her voice that Harry really didn't appreciate. "You enter through that pillar between

platform nine and ten, right there behind you. It's a magical portal that looks like a wall but is really a doorway. All you have to do is walk right into the wall without stopping."

"Well I didn't read about, but thank you very much," Harry said, not moving to put his sign down. "Guess I'll see you on the other side then."

Fuzzy stood for a moment, seeming confused.

"Aren't you going to go through?" she asked, as a middle aged couple, probably her parents, joined her.

"Not yet," said Harry.

"Why not? It's not difficult. I'll go through before you, if you are scared."

"Nah, that's fine," he said. "I'm just going to wait here a bit longer. We've got an hour before it's due to leave, and I've already made five quid," he said, nodding in thanks as another person dropped a coin onto his bag.

Fuzzy did not look impressed.

#

"Ron, you are truly a lad after my own heart," said Harry, lying back in his train seat.

Dozens of empty wrappers surrounded them, a testament to the bottomless pit theory of small boys and sweets. A mangy old rat scurried about, munching on bits and pieces of things the boys left behind.

He'd met the boy when a rather large woman, who could only be Ron's mum, hustled him and about half a dozen other kids, mostly red-heads, through the portal with ten minutes still to go before the train left.

Harry figured he could probably have made a few more quid, but was happy enough with what he got - it more than paid for his sweets splurge.

"Tell me some more stories about how your mum and dad use magic around the house and how you magical folk manage to avoid doing things the hard way."

Ron gave Harry a strange look.

"Alright," he said, chewing open another packet of beans. "But I don't see why you find 'it so interesting - just a bunch of housework really."

Harry sighed and closed his eyes, images of magic catering to this every want and need filling his imagination.

"Trust me, mate," he said, almost in a rapture. "I find them very interesting. Very interesting indeed."

#

The last thing Harry saw before the hat dropped over his eyes was the hall full of people craning to get a good look at him. Next second, he was looking at the black inside of the hat.

He waited.

"Hmm," said a small voice in his ear. "Difficult. Very difficult. You don't really fit in any house at all!"

"Plenty of courage for cheek, I see, but not enough to stand up for many others against your cousin and his boorish friends, eh? Not even enough to challenge the unfair image your Aunt gave you, although you are brave enough when it comes to trying new things."

"Quite a good mind indeed, but it's hardly ever been put to productive use, has it? Aside from the odd bits of cleverness to get you out of work, it's almost brand new."

"There's talent, oh my goodness, yes - and a nice thirst to prove yourself, but the only ambition you've got is to be left to have a quiet, easy life. Hardly very noble."

"No, there's nothing for it lad. The fact you put more effort into avoiding work than it would take to do the job, and despite that you

have never had reason to show an ounce of loyalty to anybody, you had better be Hufflepuff!" it said, shouting the last word for the whole hall to hear.

Harry briefly considered arguing, but then figured it was probably a lot more effort than it was worth. Besides, he didn't really have a preference, and what possible advantage was there to convincing a hat he was brave, intelligent, or cunning?

It was much easier to just go with the flow, and probably a lot more rewarding in the long run too.

#

"Hufflepuff prides itself on hard work and loyalty," announced the Prefect, whose name Harry could not be bothered to recall and who had nothing distinguishing about him for Harry to attach a nick name to. "As such, there are no House Elves assigned to clean our rooms. Each of you is responsible for your own bed and belongings. The rest of the rooms will be cleaned on a rotating basis. Schedules and rosters will be posted each week."

Several groans came from some of the first years at the news, although Harry wondered what the fuss was. At least he wouldn't have to pick up after Dudley.

"Wash day for you firsties is Thursday, after dinner. One of the prefects will escort you to the laundry room for the first few weeks, but then you will be expected to take care of yourselves after that."

For a moment, Harry was certain the red head girl next to him was going to faint. She went so pale at the news that he could clearly see each and every freckle on her face. When she swayed, he automatically edged away.

"Everybody is expected to be up and ready for breakfast before seven."

More groans, although Harry once again couldn't see the problem. Seven o'clock meant at least an hour's extra, precious sleep on his Privet drive start time, but judging from the horrified look on a few faces around him, he was in a minority.

"Lights out for first years is at nine thirty, and you will be changed and ready for bed at least fifteen minutes prior to that. There will be several study groups organised for those of you having any difficulty, and a senior student will always be present at the assigned table for that group each evening."

Harry perked up a bit at this. Having somebody to ask help from would be a new experience, one he fully intended to indulge, although he had to wonder if the role of the upper years was voluntary, or another downside to the house of the badgers that he had yet to look forward to.

"Welcome to Hufflepuff, the hardest working and loyalest house in Hogwarts."

Harry joined in the applause half heartedly – the words 'hardest working' putting a bit of a downer on an otherwise interesting introduction to life in a boarding school.

"Well that sucks," whispered the poncy-looking boy standing next to him. "I've never had to do my own laundry before."

The redhead girl nodded weakly, looking slightly less pale, but still rather shell-shocked.

Harry didn't mind. Laundry, even as disgusting as Dudley's and Vernon's, meant at least half an hour wasted time sorting and loading Petunia's machine instead of being outside doing something strenuous. Still, something the prefect said was bothering him.

"Hey," he said to the ponce. "What's a House-elf, and what can it do?"

As the boy explained, with anecdotes and not so helpful extra explanations from the redhead girl, Harry could feel opportunity calling, and a smile crept into his expression.

After all, just because the rooms didn't have House-elves assigned to clean them, nobody said that Harry wasn't allowed to use them. Seemed like such a waste otherwise, especially since they apparently loved to do the work, and he was sure wasting was against the Hufflepuff Credo somewhere along the line.

#

Chapter Two – The Ugly Sister of the Mother of Invention.

Magic School, Harry decided after a few days, was a lot more work than its Muggle equivalent.

Rubbing blood back into his cramping hand, Harry cast a look around the rest of class, and realised almost everybody else was also straining to keep going, so at least his misery wasn't lacking company.

Writing, with a stupid feather and ink, was a pain, literally.

Even the practical sessions where they finally got to perform magic, as opposed to just hearing about it, usually resulted in the production of reams of meandering, ink-blotted parchment as homework. At this rate, the accumulated daily note taking alone will rival the size of his text books before the year was out.

With barely any experience in writing with a Muggle pen or pencil, thanks to Petunia's skill at spreading a vicious rumour regarding his tendency to stab people with anything even slightly sharp, Harry found it doubly difficult to keep up. His personal shorthand was more suited to crayons, and didn't adapt well to quills or the subjects he was now studying.

Hufflepuff classmates would often share their notes in the common room each evening, but everybody's notes lost coherence towards the end of each class, and the final class of the day was often a total loss, especially if it was History of Magic.

Somebody made the suggestion they break up the note taking into sections, with a few people assigned to only start taking notes after the halfway mark. Nobody else thought it was a good idea to completely rely on another person's notes, and you could never be sure exactly how long the theory part was going to last to be able to pick the middle anyway.

He wanted a tape recorder, or the magical equivalent - something that could record everything the teachers said, that he could then later use to catch up. Better yet, he needed a magical quill that could write things for him. Surely somebody in the wizarding world had thought of this. All he needed to do was find out how to make one.

Or find somebody who would make one for him.

Come to think of it, there was probably dozens of labour-saving devices available in Diagon Alley, self stirring cauldron's not being the least of them. He thought it was fairly unlikely witches and wizards would travel from all over the country to London just to do a bit of shopping, so there had to be either a local shop, or a way to order things, like a mail-order system.

All Harry really needed was a catalogue, and then life was going to get much easier, otherwise the magical world was about to have some new inventions thrust upon it.

#

In his very first Transfiguration class, Harry's eyes glazed over as the implications of seeing the stern professor turn into a cat sunk in.

A cat.

Like batty old Mrs Figg's cats.

Creatures that made an art form of lazing around all day getting fed and pampered without having to do a single thing in return.

"That is so cool," he said out loud, mentally adding to his list of things he really wanted to learn.

"Thank you, Mister Potter, for that ringing endorsement," said Professor McGonagall with less than true sincerity. "For today's lesson, we will be learning how to change a matchstick into a needle."

Unfortunately there was then an hour of complicated, hand-cramping note taking before they got a chance to pick up their wands and give it a try.

Harry sat looking between his notes, his wand, and the matchstick sitting on the desk. While there was an obvious correlation to the theory and explanation of the spell in his newly written notes, he honestly could not see a single thing there to help with the casting of the spell.

Everybody else was busy waving their wands around and trying various versions of the pronunciation of the words given, but Harry sat still and concentrated on recalling exactly what the professor did to make the magic happen.

It seemed all too simple when she showed them, but when it came time to do it himself, he realised exactly how much he had missed.

"Problem, Mister Potter?" asked the Professor, coming to stand near him.

"A bit, Professor," he answered. "Could you please show it to me one more time, slower?"

"Of course," she answered, and with a deft flick and well pronounced word, effortlessly changed his matchstick.

Harry watched closely, and nodded to himself in satisfaction when she was done.

"Your turn," she said, swiftly changing the needle back.

Harry concentrated and made his first attempt.

A shiny needle, nowhere near as perfect as the one produced by the Professor, but still recognisable, lay on the desk in front of him.

"Well done!" she said, obviously surprised. "Five points for an extraordinary first try. Now try to change it back into a matchstick."

It took three goes, but Harry managed to reverse the transfiguration too, earning another five points.

"How did you do that?" asked the guy sitting next to Harry, Arnie or something, once the Professor moved on to help another student. Or was it Zeck Smith? He just couldn't seem to get up enough energy to keep all their names straight.

"What? I just copied her," Harry answered. "It didn't take anything special. Here, have another go and I'll tell you if I spot what's going wrong when you try."

"Thanks, that's real nice of you," said the boy.

Harry smiled and began helping his classmate, not at all feeling guilty about using the excuse to avoid having to repeat doing the exercise himself again and again while the others caught up.

Just because he wasn't letting himself get confused by mixing up theory and practice, and knew to concentrate on just doing exactly what was needed, it didn't mean he wanted to repeat it multiple times if he could avoid it.

Not when it was something as useless as making needles that could be bought by the dozens for a few Sickles.

#

Charms held a very special place in Harry's heart.

Not only was the teacher amiable and fun, he had a real enthusiasm for the subject that would have penetrated even Harry's normal apathy, had it been present.

As it was, learning that his mother was once a bit of a deft hand in the subject just added fuel to the fire of interest he already had.

"Sir, is there a charm for polishing shoes?" he asked the excitable professor.

"Yes, there is a charm for that!" answered the diminutive teacher.

"And for brushing your teeth?"

"Yes, there is a charm for that!"

"And ironing shirts, and tying your shoes, and washing windows?"

"Yes, yes, and yes, there is a charm for all of those things and more! It's safe to say, Mister Potter, there is probably a charm for every everyday situation you can imagine, and many you can't!"

Harry felt light headed with giddiness.

He really loved Charms.

It was pity potions sucked so badly.

It wasn't that the actual subject was that bad, although it was uncomfortably close to the cooking Petunia kept trying to make Harry do. No, it was all because of Greasy.

At the banquet, Harry got the distinct impression the potions Professor didn't like him. That didn't bother him too much, since he had been putting up with people not liking him for most of his life. By a few minutes into their first potions lesson, Harry realised Greasy actively hated him.

"Potter!" snapped Greasy immediately after his menacing introduction. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

"I have no idea, sir," said Harry, pretty bewildered by even the names of the ingredients, let alone any combining of them.

"Tut, tut - fame clearly isn't everything."

Harry felt the stirrings of annoyance deep inside himself. It took a lot to get Harry's goat, but Greasy was managing it quite easily.

"Let's try again. Potter, where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

"In a zoo?"

The look on the professor's face was almost pleasure. He was clearly enjoying humiliating Harry, and Harry felt those simmering bubbles of rebellion start to swell.

"Not likely. What is the difference, Potter, between monkshood and wolfsbane?"

"I have no idea," answered Harry a bit tersely.

Greasy smiled an evil, self-satisfied little smirk.

"Thought you wouldn't open a book before coming, eh, Potter?"

Yep, that was enough to do it.

"Well, no, sir," answered Harry, relaxing into his well practiced schoolroom slouch – the one that didn't really look like he was slouching, but nevertheless gave a distinct impression of it.

If this git was going to try stir Harry up, he was going to have to work a lot harder than that. Harry was a bit of an expert at reading and manipulating other people's emotions; it was a skill he needed when dealing with the Dursleys in order to keep them from getting upset enough to really punish him, or make him work.

"I figured that was what school was for, you know, reading and learning and stuff. I mean, if we were meant to learn all of it at home, what would be the point of showing up? I could have stayed in bed and read books all day."

The look on Greasy's face and the laughter of a few of his classmates made Harry decide to declare this a victory, but he knew the war had only just begun, and he really wasn't likely to win.

Still, a bit of revenge like that was just too easy to pass up, as others would eventually discover.

#

"Harry, you need to get dressed before you go up for breakfast," said the seventh year prefect named Tonks, although Harry didn't still bother with names too often. "Even if you are early, you still need to get changed."

She was quite an attractive girl, and spoke politely and with kindness to everybody. He mentally referred to her as 'The Pretty Prefect', since memorising real names of people he would likely only spend a year in school with felt like a total waste of effort.

"I am dressed," he said, sounding puzzled.

"In your pyjamas," she said.

"These aren't my pyjamas. Besides, you are wearing yours."

"These are not pyjamas, these are standard school robes."

"They look like pyjamas to me. My aunty has a nightgown just like that, except it's a bit baggier and doesn't look anywhere near as good on her."

"Well they are not pyjamas, and you need to get out of yours and into a robe before you go up to breakfast."

"I told you, these aren't my pyjamas, and Slick gets to wear his pyjamas every day. I'll have to take your word on the robes versus nightgown thing though, since I can't really tell the difference."

Tonks resisted the urge to rub her temples, a feeling several of the other prefects had already mentioned often encountering when dealing with one Harry Potter.

"Draco Malfoy does not wear his pyjamas outside of the Slytherin common room," she said with exaggerated patience.

"Yes he does. They've got pretty gold patterns around the edges and everything."

"They are custom robes, probably made by the finest seamstresses in Diagon alley," Tonks explained.

"Well then, these are custom robes made by the best Muggle manufacturers in, er, China," said Harry, sparing a moment to check the tag on his pants.

Tonks sighed. It was going to be another one of those conversations, like when Harry argued for putting in escalators for going up out of the common room, and a fireman's pole or slide to get back down, just to save having to walk the stairs.

"Potter, the student handbook makes it very clear that school robes are to be worn at all times outside of the common room and your dorms. The clothes you are wearing are not school robes. They are in fact white, and covered in cute little yellow ducks. There is no way they can possibly be considered modified school robes, mainly because they are not robes at all, having trouser legs and such. Malfoy is not wearing pyjamas. He is wearing customised robes. Now, if you don't go back and get changed out of your pyjamas and into your robes, you will not be getting breakfast, and I'll deduct points for being out of uniform. Clear?"

"Fine," said Harry sullenly. "But can you tell me exactly how much school robes are allowed to be customised then?"

Grumbling, Tonks reached for her copy of the handbook, thankful that experience had taught her to keep it handy for at least the first few weeks of term. It only took a few moments for her to find the relevant pages.

"Here we go," she said. "School robes are to bear only the crest of the House of the student over the right breast, and may not be altered in any way beyond the colour and design approved by the Hogwarts board Declaration 1022 -1893."

"Cool," said Harry, smiling. "I guess that means you'll have to deduct points from Slick then, doesn't it?"

A strange feeling of enlightenment suddenly dawned on Tonks.

"You, this, you staged this, didn't you?" she said accusingly. "This whole thing was just a set up to make me look up that rule, so now I have to report Malfoy, because I know he really is out of uniform."

"As if I am that smart," laughed Harry. "Although, that git does deserve a bit of payback for trying to get me into a duel he never intended on showing up for. Nah, I was just hoping to avoid having to get changed, since you all wear nightgowns everywhere anyway."

As he casually wandered down the tunnel leading to his dorm, Tonks watched him go, unsure if he was serious, or just very cunning.

"Wait, if they are not your pyjamas, whose are they?" she called out to him before he disappeared around the corner.

"I don't know," answered Harry, shrugging. "The House-elves gave them to me after they burned my old ones and hit the ashes with sticks. They seemed pretty upset with most of my clothes for some reason, although it possibly has something to do with their general state."

It was only long after he had gone that Tonks started wondering how House-elves got a hold of his clothes in the first place.

#

After waiting seemingly forever with the patience that comes from never bothering to rush into anything, the day of Harry's first flying lesson finally arrived. It was definitely one of his most eagerly anticipated classes.

"Up!" said Harry, fully expecting the broom to leap into his hand, which it immediately did.

A few of the others were having trouble, and automatically looked to him for help, since he had easily gotten it to work for him.

"Don't take no for an answer," suggested Harry. "Command it, and mean it, and you'll get better results."

Taking his advice, his remaining classmates soon all stood holding their brooms and looking grateful, and he earned five points from Madam Hooch, who Harry privately referred to as Spike, after her rather unique hair style.

"Does that work in the other classes too?" asked Hannah, whom Harry just called Han (because 'Sue's buddy' seemed a little bit too impersonal, and it was likely to get him in trouble with the temperamental girls).

"Dunno," said Harry. "I just made it up to make it look like I know something, but it sounds about right. I'll try it out and let you know how it goes later."

Hannah smothered her giggles with a hand and turned to pay proper attention to the flying instructor.

He only half listened to what was obviously a standard safety talk, the rest of his mind thinking about all the possibilities presented by being able to fly any distance for almost no effort.

The odorous task of walking imposed by the tyranny of gravity had just lost some of its hold on him, and he was not going to give it back without a fight.

#

Getting mail delivered to your hand at breakfast time was another thing Harry liked.

It sure beat the trudge to the mail box and back of number four every morning, no matter the weather. Of course, before his Hogwarts letter, he had never received any mail of his own to collect and so avoided doing that job as often as possible, but it was still nice to know anything sent to him now would end up wherever he happened to be when it arrived.

The beautiful white owl swooped down to land on his plate, and started greedily helping herself to his bacon. Although he appreciated the birthday gift from Hagrid, he really hadn't been all that keen on owning a pet, since he imagined it would mean a lot of extra work and responsibility.

He was very happy to discover Hedwig spent the vast majority of her day sleeping, and was able to hunt for herself at night. It was like a match made in heaven, despite her atrocious table manners and habit of making sure Harry's mail deliveries always resulted in owl foot prints all over anything she did not gobble up before he could chase her off.

Pushing the gorging bird off his plate, Harry took a moment to pull open the strap holding the rolled note to the owl's leg. The loud tearing sound made the people sitting around him wince.

"Bit of bad luck that," said the ponce, who Harry was fairly certain was named Jay, or Justin, or something like that.

"Excuse me?" asked Harry, confused.

"You tore your letter," said Justin, who Harry decided needed to be called J from now on, since Justin was way too much of a mouthful for everyday conversation.

"Eh? No I didn't," said Harry, holding up the undamaged note from Hagrid.

"What was that noise then?" asked Sue, sitting across the table from him.

"It's called Velcro. I didn't like the idea of having to tie and untie stupidly fiddly little bits of string all the time."

#

Harry usually had no problem coping with boredom.

Lonely hours spent in his cupboard for one transgression or another, with nothing more than spiders and dust to play with, meant he had to develop some serious boredom-fighting techniques.

Sleeping was a good one, but pretty much unusable in any class including History of Magic (due to Harry's sudden and irrational inability to sleep in the same room as a ghost – much to his great disgust at missing such a fine opportunity for extra snoozing).

Daydreaming extraordinarily complex scenarios was another good way to pass the time, one that got him through much of his primary schooling, and that was serving him rather well when it came to Defence Against the Dark Arts.

Never before had Harry come across a person who could take such an interesting subject, a class full of eager students, and turn it into a nightmare of wasted time.

So he bent his considerable talent and began crafting elaborate stories involving the turban headed, stuttering professor at the front of the room and the subject matter they were meant to be covering.

Before he knew it, class was over and Harry had somehow managed to learn more than anybody else, simply because he was thinking about the actual spells and creatures that were meant to be part of the lesson and not drifting off thinking about something more interesting to most people his age, like girls, or sports.

It would really be a shame if Garlic Guy turned out just to be a smelly, turbaned bloke with a stutter and a ridiculously low bravery threshold, not after all of the villains and heroes Harry had him playing in his imaginary mindscape.

#

Unlike almost every other event or holiday during the year, Halloween at the Dursleys usually did not involve any extra work for Harry. He was most often stuck in his cupboard, not allowed to do anything lest his own special brand of mischief ran amok on the one night famed such things.

Even Dudley was only allowed to go out if he dressed up as a super hero or something else 'normal'. Anything involving magic or the mystical was immediately boycotted by Vernon and Petunia, no matter how much fatty cried and sulked about it.

Getting to join in the festivities in the main hall at Hogwarts was therefore an exciting bonus for Harry, who was just glad not to be back at the Dursleys listening to Dudley brag about the tricks he pulled (beating up smaller children and stealing their treats being the most common one).

Having the wonderful party in the lavishly decorated hall interrupted was not something he appreciated.

The panic as Quirell collapsed on the floor after his shocking announcement came to a sudden halt when Dumbledore set off a huge blast of noise. As the headmaster issued his commands and the prefects started leading people away, Harry stayed in his seat thinking things over.

Thinking about things before acting often saved Harry a lot of otherwise wasted effort.

Before the feast, Ron mentioned to Harry that Fuzzy was sulking in a bathroom, although he was less than forthcoming about exactly why. It didn't take a lot of thought for Harry to realise what the easiest right thing to do was.

"Excuse me," he said, pulling the sleeve of the prefect Ron had identified as one of his many older brothers, along with the pranksters B1 and B2. "Do you know you are missing one of your first years?"

"What?" asked Percy.

"The girl with the bushy hair, Hermy or something," he explained. "Your brother Ron told me she was hiding in a toilet for some reason."

"Oh dear," said Percy. "Thank you for telling me."

Then he rushed off towards the professors, leaving Harry behind.

Harry returned to his table only to discover his own house had left without him. Shaking his head in annoyance, he headed off in the direction he was pretty sure was a short cut to the dorms.

He was still trying to figure out the moving stairs, but there was definitely a pattern to them. Harry felt sure he would considerably shorten the distances he had to travel between classes if he could unlock the secret schedule of their movement.

Lost in thought, he rounded a corner just in time to see the Troll turn and spot him.

Despite the Sorting Hat's comments, Harry was not lacking in the bravery department, but he also had a very large dose of practicality, and a healthy respect for pain. Seeing a small mountain of stinking Troll flesh start lumbering towards him with a massive club raised above its head was not enough to freeze him in fear, but it did make him panic.

"SSSHHHHHHHIIIIITTTTTT," he yelled, turning and bolting back the way he had come.

Of course the Troll followed.

Luckily the screaming boy ran right into a hallway full of teachers just heading out to search the castle.

With a few deft flicks of their wands, the ugly brute of a creature was immobilised, but Harry was nowhere to be seen. It was several hours later that Dumbledore found him hiding at the top of the Astronomy tower.

"I figured if it couldn't fit up the stairs, it wouldn't come up," Harry explained.

"But surely you must have known we would be able to overcome it," said McGonagall, apparently unconvinced by Harry's explanation.

"Sure," the young boy answered. "But I thought, 'better safe than sorry'."

Several of the faculty nodded in agreement, even going as far as awarding Harry points for being sensible, much to Greasy's disgust.

Only Hermione would ever know the real reason he had not returned soon after calming down. A few days after the incident, she tracked him down to thank him for saving her life, and then interrogated him endlessly until she had the full story.

While a bit indignant that Harry had not really led the Troll away intentionally, she appreciated him telling somebody about her absence, and promised to keep secret that he had discovered the Astronomy tower was actually a really great place to catch a quiet nap.

#

"What are you doing here?" asked Malfoy, making what Harry considered a decent effort to copy Greasy's sneer. "Did you get lost or something?"

Harry looked up from his breakfast bowl. He knew he should just ignore the git, like he normally did, but he was feeling a bit frisky this morning, and so decided to use his energy baiting the boy.

"That's really witty, Slick. It must have taken you a whole hour to think that one up, or did you ask somebody else to help you out, your daddy maybe? Then again, it's probably some sort of pureblood traditional insult or something that only a tenth generation inbred clone like you is allowed to use - on pain of death or torture."

Gregory Goyle, who was sitting next to Harry, let out a surprisingly girly giggle, a few of the people further down the table also smiled at Harry's retort, not liking Malfoy one bit and happy for anybody to take him down a peg or two.

"What are doing at the Slytherin table?" asked Draco, after giving Goyle an angry look.

"I think I am eating breakfast, but if you can't tell, I might be doing it wrong. Maybe you can sit down and show us how a real wizard like you does it. Do you need a special hand crafted, golden spork, or will normal every day cutlery do?"

Draco's face screwed up in anger, but a few more smiles appeared on the crowd pretending not to watch, and Goyle grinned again.

"Potter, you are a disgrace. When was the last time you even tried to comb your hair? And look at the state of your robes. You make them look like they have never been ironed."

Harry sighed.

"Slick, just how many hours do you spend each day playing with yourself in front of a mirror? Don't you see something wrong with putting all that energy into looking pretty? Gar here got so hungry waiting for you he had to come down and get something to eat before he faded away to nothing."

Louder sniggers from around the table made Draco's face redden even further.

"This is the Slytherin table, you imbecile. You eat over there, at the table for the losers."

"Actually, I think I'll sit just here, for a few days at least. There is nothing in the rule book about it."

"Mister Potter. What do you think you are doing?" asked Professor McGonagall as she strode into the hall and saw the confrontation.

Harry still privately referred to her as Mrs Mac, or Princess, but not anywhere she would hear him, not after he slipped up once and found out exactly how much she appreciated that particular lazy habit of his by rewarding him with the task of writing an obsessively long written assignment on the correct way to address people.

"Just trying to improve inter-house relationships, Professor. I thought I'd eat with the Slytherins and get to know a few of them better, since we barely share any classes and it's hard to learn about other people when you don't interact with them at all."

An odd expression crossed the stern professor's face.

"Very good," she said at last. "Five points to Hufflepuff for your efforts, and five to Slytherin as well, of course."

Draco looked like he was going to pop a blood vessel, but the rest of the table looked suitably surprised and pleased.

"Your mother was close friends with at least one student from Slytherin for most of her years, Mister Potter. It's good to see you continuing the tradition."

Harry smiled as the professor continued down the hall to the head table, and Draco sulkily took a seat near Harry.

"Why are you really here?" the blonde boy whispered angrily.

"Table is closer to the door," said Harry, skewering another ration of bacon off the plate in front of him.

Goyle nearly burst a vein trying to keep the laughter in.

#

"Harry, why are you reading a book on Runes? Isn't that, like fourth year work or something?"

"Did you know that a properly drawn Rune sequence can act like a spell, but without you having to cast it time and time again?" asked Harry.

"Er, no."

"Now you do," said Harry returning to his reading, which was really way too advanced for him.

Casting spells was fun and all, but having to do the same spells over and over again would quickly get to be a drag. Just knowing about Runes meant he had a worthwhile goal to aim for, and he could probably pay, blackmail, convince, or trick somebody else to do the actual work until he mastered it himself.

"You do realise you could probably cast that particular spell dozens of times for the effort you are putting into learning how to make the Runes to do it for you, don't you?"

"That's not the point," said Harry, getting a little bit irritated.

"Okay, then. I'll just leave you to it."

Harry returned to his study, determined to find a way to make his shoe laces tie themselves when he put his shoes on, but he was a bit annoyed.

Nobody seemed to understand.

#

Christmas was not an event Harry looked forward to.

Usually it involved spending most of the day running around cleaning up after Dudley and Vernon, while trying to help Petunia prepare a fifteen course dinner that he would barely get to sample.

Staying at Hogwarts where he was not expected to do any extra work, or any work at all really, was already promising to make it the best Christmas he could remember, but then he got a big pile of gifts from friends and admirers making it officially better than he ever imagined.

Then there was one very special present from an anonymous sender that topped all the others.

The silky material fell out of the plain package and gathered into a lump on the floor.

"Is that an invisibility cloak?" asked J.

"Wow," said Ern.

"Brilliant," said Harry, his thoughts uncharacteristically threatening to run out of control with excitement.

"You'll be able to sneak around and nobody will ever catch you," whispered J, as if he was scared to even talk about rule breaking.

"Screw that," said Harry, gathering up the cloak.

He suddenly draped it over himself, disappearing from the other boy's view completely. His bed squeaked softly, and a depression formed down the middle of the sheets.

"Don't either of you two dare tell anybody," said Harry, sounding quite threatening. "I finally have a way to avoid being pestered, meaning at least an hour or two extra sleep, and the person who takes that away from me is going to pay, big time."

By the time both boys left the room, Harry's quiet snores were drifting from the seemingly empty bed, his dreams of a House-elf wearing his invisibility cloak sneaking around doing all of his work for him in total secrecy bringing a smile to his unseen face.

#

"Harry Potter," called the prefect, whose name he knew the boy-who-liked-to-sleep-in still seemingly couldn't be bothered remembering.

The fact he had been at school for months and still didn't know even his roommate's names was fairly indicative of his general attitude, and a source of irritation for much of the rest of Hufflepuff.

"Yes?" Harry answered automatically, then cursed and leapt forward to grab at something on the parchment in front of him. "Bugger!"

Murray Rickett, the prefect, stopped at the sight of Harry wrestling with a very odd looking, multi-feathered quill. Finally the younger boy managed to touch his wand to the top of the ungainly thing, and it stopped moving.

"This had better be important," said Harry. "You almost ruined my essay."

"What is that thing?" asked the prefect, curiosity winning out over his original mission.

"This," said Harry, holding up the strange construct, "is the best I could do, considering I had to use spell-o-tape because my sticking charms wear off after a couple of hours."

Murray thought about leaving it at that, knowing in his heart that it was bound to be another violation of one rule or another, but he just couldn't let it go.

"What does it do?" he asked.

Harry smiled, the sort of self-satisfied grin the rest of the House of Badgers was coming to know meant trouble.

"Writes my assignments," Harry said, pushing over the parchment.

Picking up the offered page, Murray read what appeared to be a well written and nicely penned essay that stopped abruptly with the words 'Yes? Bugger!'

Before he could open his mouth to comment, Harry was again speaking, answering his unspoken questions.

"Don't worry, Muzza, it doesn't actually write the assignment for me, it's just more of a dictating quill that saves my hand from becoming crippled."

Murray put the page down and rubbed his temple wearily. Why did Potter have to be his responsibility? The lucky dip of which prefect looked out for which first year had seemed like such a good thing at the time, but now his immodest bragging about snagging the boy-who-lived as one of his 'little brothers' was coming back to haunt him in unexpected ways.

"How?" he asked, after a moment, despite knowing he was just asking for another confusing and convoluted plot to make one student's life easier.

"I read out from my notes and it writes what I say," said Harry.

"That's what a normal dictating quill does."

"True, but a normal dictating quill, which I use to take class notes in the first place, doesn't correct grammar and spelling. So I cut the top

off an autocorrecting quill and strapped it to the dictating quill. It forces the quill to write properly, even though it's not actually touching the page."

Murray thought for a moment, and realised there was actually nothing inherently wrong with that, aside from the possibility of not learning as well because he was not taking notes by hand.

"What's the third one for?" he asked.

"Self-inking," said Harry. "The dictating quill kept dropping splotches, so I cut the end off it to shorten it and then taped it to a self-inking quill. It took a bit of time to figure out how to get the three to work together, but now I don't even have to blot my pages."

It was definitely lazy, something every Hufflepuff was told to abhor, but quite clever. The idea actually had a lot of merit, and was worth further investigation. Murray himself could really use something like this. Seventh year was ridiculously difficult, and nobody had time to correct every minor spelling error, despite the inevitable loss of marks.

"You couldn't make me one, could you?" he asked hopefully.

Harry smiled and dug into his bag for a moment before pulling out a slightly cruder looking contraption of similar design.

"Sorry, but I am going to have to ask you for a half a Galleon to cover the costs. I went through quite a few quills before I got it working, and none of them are cheap."

Murray gulped at the huge price tag, but quickly realised it was well worth it, if it worked. Money changed hands and he walked away with his new possession, eager to try it out on the pile of homework he had waiting for him. If it did work, he really owed Potter one.

In his haste, he completely forgot that he had originally approached the first year to reprimand him for somehow convincing the Houseelves to bring him breakfast in bed, supposedly saving him twenty minutes each day of 'trudging through the hallways'. Later, when a very happy Murray finally remembered, he decided to let it pass.

After all, Potter would probably never have had the time to research and create something this good if he was stuck doing the mundane things all of the time.

#

"Potter!" yelled Snape, making half of the class jump, and the other half squeal, squeak, and even swear. "Who said you could get away with not making your potions by hand in my class?"

Harry silently cursed himself. He had absentmindedly taken his hand off the mixing stick, allowing Greasy to see that it was moving without aid.

"You did, sir," he said, putting as much innocence into his voice as possible.

It had been a good run, much better than he thought it would be, but it was still disappointing to see it come to an end.

"I did no such thing," snarled the surly professor. "Five points from Hufflepuff and detention for lying. Now throw that miserable concoction out and start again, with a normal cauldron."

"Excuse me sir," said Harry, again forcing his voice to sound meek and mild, "but you told everybody last month that some of us were incapable of stirring our own tea, me in particular. Since I totally agree with you, I had to find an alternative."

"Another ten points from Hufflepuff for arguing with your betters," said Snape, his self-satisfied sneer reaching startling new proportions. "I doubt you have forgotten that I banned your self-stirring cauldron after the very first class?"

"No, sir, I remember that very clearly, it was just after you made us put away our wands, which is why I am not using a self-stirring cauldron."

Snape's contempt reached new heights as he gleefully swooped down the aisle towards Harry.

"Then why is your cauldron stirring itself even as we speak?" he asked, looming over Harry threateningly. "Does it suddenly have a

mind of its own, or are you somehow able to move the mixer without touching it?"

The sarcasm was so thick it almost made Vernon's efforts feel witty in comparison. It would be enough to give the nastier Slytherins a fit of giggling when they eventually found out about it, of course.

"Yes, sir," said Harry as meekly as he could, which was quite a bit really.

"Yes, sir?" asked Snape. "What do you mean, 'yes, sir'?"

"I can move it without touching it. Specifically, I can tell it exactly how many turns to make, how often to do it, and in which direction. The cauldron is just a normal one, but the mixer is enchanted. That way I can use it on several different potions at once, if I have to, without having to buy lots of expensive self-stirring cauldrons."

Greasy's sudden red-faced resemblance to Vernon made Harry wonder if he was going about this the right way. While Vernon could be manipulated into allowing him to get away with doing less, thinking an alternative task cleverly suggested by Harry was actually worse, Snape seemed determined to not allow Harry to get anything done at all. It was really cramping his style, and worse yet, adding to his workload.

"Another detention for your cheek," the professor practically growled out in a low voice, appearing to fight a battle with his temper. "Now, start again."

With a swirl of his cape, Snape turned his back on Harry and marched back to the front of the class, snapping almost randomly at various Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw students.

Harry sighed and began digging around in his bag for his spare mixer and an empty jar. Prior experience in Greasy's class taught Harry that he was rarely going to be able to complete any of the work, so he had convince a seventh year to cast a spell on several jars that would allow him to suspend most potions and continue them at a later time. That way, any work he did do was not wasted.

A slight smile twitched the corners of Harry's mouth as he battled not to break out into a full blown grin. Only Sue saw it, and shot a questioning look his way.

"Later," he mouthed silently with a small shake of his head.

The mixer worked perfectly, meaning he had the spells down pat. Next week, he was planning on testing a knife that would cut perfectly every time, since it was basically the same set of spells as his enchanted mixer. Snape already told him he was incapable of using a knife with sufficient dexterity to butter bread, so he had an excuse ready again, for all the good it done him this time.

It would be nice to get through at least one potion's lesson without being singled out by Greasy for some form of amateur ridicule and criticism, but at least this way he could plan what he was likely going to get attacked for.

The fact his head of house had already given him twenty points for showing initiative, Professor Flit ten for excellent charm work, and McG another five for showing Nev how to use one of his spares to practice with, countered Greasy's obsessive point taking and made sure the rest of the badgers did not hold his 'initiative' against him.

Of course, the real reason he bothered spending time developing ways to combine these particular spells was because Petunia never allowed him to use her electric mixer, and beating eggs or cream by hand was a laborious task. An enchanted fork could do the job much faster, and he could pretend to be holding it.

All in all, he had to consider this trial a success.

Now he just had to figure out what to do about the detentions.

#

Only AFC makes it possible. Thanks again guys.

#

Chapter Three - Sleep for Fun and Prophet

"Potter!" yelled the caretaker, grabbing Harry's shoulder roughly.

Harry suddenly stopped scrubbing and sat up, blinking his eyes, as if he was coming out of a daze.

"Sorry, Gig-, er, sir," he said, nearly slipping up and calling the man his pet name of 'Giggles'. "I didn't notice you there."

"I've been calling you for two minutes already," snarled the perpetually annoyed man. "You should have gone back to your dorm twenty minutes ago. What do you think you are doing?"

"Sorry, sir," said Harry again. "I guess I just got caught up in it."

"You got caught up? Scrubbing floors?" asked Filch. "Is there something wrong with you, boy?"

"Yes, sir. I mean, no, sir. Nothing wrong, I just got caught up," said Harry, stumbling over himself trying to answer. "It's kind of hypnotic, if you know what I mean."

Filch squinted and glared at Harry, possibly trying to see if he was making fun or not.

"Er, can I go then, sir?" asked Harry, tightly clutching the worn old brush he had been using to his chest.

Filch glared some more, then cast a glance over the area where Harry had been working. It was spotless.

"Yeah," he said, sounding annoyed and looking at Harry suspiciously. "Get back to your dorm."

Harry wasted no time in walking away, not even pausing as he called a hurried "Thank you, sir" over his shoulder.

Filch watched the boy run away, and then looked at the floor again.

"Filthy urchin," he grumbled out loud. "Must be up to something."

Luckily, he didn't notice Harry had taken the brush with him.

It would not do to lose the specially enchanted thing to the unappreciative, grumpy bugger, not after it had cost Harry some favours and a few coins to get a couple of talented sixth years to design and make it.

They were having a bit of trouble working out why the gloves Harry originally commissioned for a similar purpose had dissolved after one cauldron-scrubbing detention. The flesh coloured gloves had a lot of charms on them, mainly to hide them from Snape, but nothing should have made them fall apart like they did after a single use.

Their best guess was some sort of penetrating acid or poison in the cauldrons, but not even Harry believed Greasy hated him enough to try and kill him, well not yet anyway - or at least not during a detention the slimy git personally supervised - so it had to be something else. Charming the brush was an alternative that seemed to be working out well enough though.

They still hadn't completely mastered the sleep-walking curse yet either, at least not to the point where they could add a timed alarm and a proximity sensor. That and the need to cast it every time were the current major drawbacks of his plan.

Harry was hoping they would be able to implant the curse into something like a necklace, meaning it would not have to be cast each time, but would just need to be put on and activated somehow for a set period.

Once they had, the brush and the curse together would be perfect for many of the boring cleaning chores Giggles and Greasy loved to heap on the first years, and him especially.

There was something inherently satisfying thinking about being able to get a few hours extra sleep while Greasy thought he was been punished – almost as satisfying as watching the git's blood pressure slowly rise whenever he tried to get a rise out of Harry using lame insults, but only gave Harry more opportunities to demonstrate his apathy to the twit's antagonism. Harry's record for inspiring a time-

wasting rant from the nut case was currently fifteen minutes, but he was certain he was on track to get that up to at least thirty without lifting a finger – literally.

It was after another such sleepy, floor scrubbing detention that Harry suddenly found himself standing in a dimly lit, unused classroom. In front of him stood a large mirror set inside an elaborate, ornate frame, silently standing as if waiting for somebody to use it. Strange, foreign looking words were carved along the top edge – which Harry didn't bother to try to read or decipher.

Unsure of exactly how he got there, but figuring he must have nodded off on his way back to the dorms and was still being affected by the sleep-walking curse, Harry shrugged and was about to leave when he noticed something wrong about his reflection.

It didn't show him standing in a classroom clutching a worn old brush to his chest; it showed him comfortably stretched out, with his hands behind his head, in an enormous, soft looking hammock that was gently swinging from side to side by itself.

An exotic looking drink of some description sat in a huge glass on a side table, with a straw stretching at least a metre to his mouth. As he rocked, the straw magically stretched and shrank, staying in place in his drink with no effort on his part.

As he watched, his mirror-self lazily reached out to take a handful of food, possibly crisps, from a bowl hovering magically nearby.

In front of his hammock, a huge screen floated. It was at least two metres wide and almost as tall, and was playing a movie that Harry couldn't really make out.

The hammock looked like it was positioned on the veranda of a wooden bungalow. A sandy, warm looking beach stretched out around it, running down to the crystal blue waters of a tropical looking ocean that lapped gently on the shore. Palms and other exotic trees and plants swayed gently in a slight breeze, giving the same impression of relaxed luxury Harry always felt when enviously looking at the Dursley's junk mail advertising holidays in a warmer climate – a climate that was always pleasant enough to have lovely looking girls frolicking about in skimpy bikinis.

Behind him, inside his simple looking bungalow, a crowd of smiling House-elves scampered about, apparently taking care of his every need even before he knew he wanted it.

"Hmm, now that's definitely something to aim towards," he said to himself, surprisingly finding the vision inspiring.

Then he nodded and left the room heading for his bed, determined to add conjuring a hammock to his ever-growing list of spells he needed to learn, but not motivated enough to take careful note of the location of the classroom and its magical mirror.

After all, once he had seen perfection, why would he need to return?

#

Reading was never really Harry's 'thing'.

If Petunia ever caught sight of him doing something as 'non-productive' as reading, she quickly found more chores for him.

Harry learned very early on that finishing tasks too quickly only led to more work and not to time off to pursue his own activities, like reading. He figured out dozens of ways to make his never-ending list of chores easier, but still managed to drag out even the simplest job for extraordinary lengths of time, often without appearing to slack off at all.

Besides, reading was actually quite a lot of work. Thousands of words wasted describing things that simply did not matter to the story, or volumes filled with meaningless day to day routines of the characters, really did nothing to ease the chore of making an understanding of it all.

Comic books were much, much better.

With only a few words and several panels of often elaborate illustrations, whole chapters of book meaning and plot could be covered. It really was a pity Harry's access to them was limited due to Dudley's obsessive need to deprive his cousin of anything remotely enjoyable, despite the fact there was still too much reading involved for the fat boy's brain to handle.

Learning that the staff and students at Hogwarts appeared to think reading was indeed productive changed Harry's attitude a great deal.

Hours could be wasted away, mostly asleep, just so long as he kept a book open in front of him, and remembered to cast a little used, simple spell to turn a page every now and then.

Nobody would bother him, trying to get him into some sort of extra-credit work, like volunteering to work an extra hour a week in the greenhouses or something, while he was apparently immersed in a book. These do-gooders would see him apparently concentrating on reading, and leave him alone, like he was some sort of testy Ravenclaw or something.

Not much in those pages sunk in, but he spent so much time 'fake-reading', that even that little bit of accidental learning started to accumulated.

Once Harry realised he was learning and slacking off at the same time, he started to take his selection of time-wasting volumes a bit more seriously. Gone were the meaningless histories that were not part of the curriculum. Out the door went the ridiculously obscure Magical Theory works he had no chance of understanding, although they had worked very well at reducing the number of people wanting to discuss what he was reading.

In came simpler books carefully selected to ensure anything he inadvertently did pick up would directly help in reducing his study workload.

Books filled with note-taking tips, essay writing examples, memory training tricks, study guides, old exams papers, even several works on improving penmanship and a really strange volume on self hypnosis all became his faithful extra-work-avoiding tools.

He sometimes also used a charm that could quietly read the text out to him without anybody else hearing, so that he didn't actually have to read the words, but it was an effort to cast.

Still, as more of it sunk in, Harry's apparent dedication somehow gained him a reputation as a person working hard to overcome his neglected Muggle upbringing, which was only a slight distortion of the truth really.

All he cared about was stopping people from bugging him, and in that he was mostly successful.

Mostly.

"Harry," whispered the red-head, Sue or Susan or something. "Do you have any more of those quills? I broke mine, again."

"Sorry," said Harry, looking up from his book. "I don't make them anymore, but if you go see that Ravenclaw prefect guy, the one with the crooked nose—"

"Riley?"

"Err, yeah, could be. Anyway, he is making them now."

Sue smiled brightly.

"Thanks, Harry. You're a life saver."

Harry grinned, nodded, and went back to his book. Offloading the production of his 'Assignment Quills' was a good idea, especially since the older boy managed to come up with a better way of combining the three quills that made them more durable and longer lasting. More importantly, it took the burden of manufacturing his increasingly popular invention away from him.

No need to mention that Harry still got a cut of the sale price, and most of the credit. He was building up quite a nice little profit with this and other time saving things he thought up, and that meant more resources to spend on avoiding work.

Yep, anything worth doing well was worth getting somebody more talented to do it for you.

"Harry, are you going to visit Hagrid? Can I come with you?"

Harry sighed and put down his book. Fuzzy the Gryff spent even more time in the library than he did, so it was natural they had gotten to know each other better, especially after the Troll thing. The fact she appeared to have no other friends also made Harry feel for her,

since he knew exactly how lonely that could be. It didn't take a lot of effort to be kind.

Actually, it took a lot more effort to be nasty, which is why Harry didn't understand the lengths some people went to just to be mean, or why so many people thought of him as 'a nice guy' when all he was being was easy-going.

"Who? Oh, you mean Tiny? Yeah, I'm going to have tea with him," said Harry.

"How is calling him Tiny any easier than calling him Hagrid?" asked Hermione. "No, never mind answering that, I can see it now. Anyway, can I come with you?"

"Only if you promise not to go over this week's Herbology assignment requirements by more than about a fifth of the asking length," he said.

Her extensive knowledge, especially when it came to knowing which books held the relevant information he needed for his assignments, meant she often saved him a lot of time and energy, but her tendency to go well beyond what was requested by the professors was a habit that just had to be broken, for her own good as well as his. Proof reading a Hermione-written assignment, so that she would read his in turn, was proving to be less than an even trade.

Hermione bit her lip, obviously torn by conflicting desires.

"But I've already completed it," she said, a sly look appearing on her face. "That's means I'd have to rewrite it, and you know you are always telling me I do that too often."

Harry laughed.

"Very good," he said. "I guess that means you'll just have to promise to keep the next one down to the actual requirements instead. Deal?"

"Deal," she said, smiling happily at his praise. "Although I think it's a bit unfair of you to keep blackmailing me into not doing my very best."

"Oh, but I am not trying to make you do less than your very best," he said absently, packing up his books. "I'm just trying to convince you to do less, full stop. It should still be your very best, just nothing else."

He didn't notice the thoughtful look that appeared on Hermione's face at his words, but over the next few weeks, the professors definitely noticed their effect, and were mostly very grateful for it.

#

"How can you not be curious about what it was that Hagrid took from the vault?" Hermione asked. "It has to be very important for somebody to break in and try to steal it."

Harry shrugged and continued walking back towards the castle, their latest visit to Hagrid having gone well, despite the inedible rock cakes. Harry had a few in his pocket that he intended on using at breakfast the next time he sat with Slick.

"Hasn't got anything to do with me," he said.

Hermione was flabbergasted.

"But, don't you want to know?"

"Sure," he said, with a shrug, "just not badly enough to bother going to any effort to find out."

#

"Hiya, Harry," said Ron. "Got any new tips to pass on? I feel like I am busting a gut trying to keep up with all this bleeding work, even with your great quill thing."

"Nothing new, mate," said Harry, opening his eyes to see Ron and Nev standing over him.

Good places to catch a nap undisturbed were becoming harder to find. Unused classrooms were not particularly comfortable, since his transfiguration skills were not up to making anything even approaching a soft surface.

The astronomy tower was also out of bounds now, not because he had been caught, since that was not really that much of a deterrent, but because he was having a wonderful dream about flying off it and woke up to find himself climbing onto the parapet. It was lucky he was quite used to breaking himself out of trances and dreams and into instant alertness, or things could have gotten nasty.

Still, it shook him up and made him choose not to return to his favourite spot, at least not until he could be sure nothing like that was going to happen again.

So far he had resisted the temptation to live under his invisibility cloak, reasoning the more he used it the more likely its successful use would be compromised. He kept it only for those sacred times it was perfect for – morning sleep-ins.

"I've gotten the spells for making my bed down pat, but I doubt you need that, especially since you get House-elves to do yours, you lucky bugger."

Ron scrunched his nose up in mock disgust.

"Pity," the red-head said. "You've really saved me and the other guys a heap of work this year, you know?"

"Never really thought about it, but you're welcome," answered Harry.

He had in fact thought about it, long and hard. It was a novel experience to have people grateful to him, and he discovered that he rather enjoyed it. The fact he was just showing them what came naturally to him was a bonus.

"Oh, I have almost finished figuring out what's needed to build a life-like manikin to take my place in History of magic," he said, remembering another of his 'side projects'. "I can show you how to do that if you like, although I still can't actually cast the spells myself."

"Nah, we can sleep through History," said Ron, "unlike you."

Harry gave an involuntary shudder, still annoyed he had been unable to overcome his inability to catch some zs while there was a ghost in the room with him.

"So what's new, Nev?" he asked to change the topic. "You still thinking about joining the Griff's quid-thingy team? I was telling Eddy he might have to look out for you."

All three laughed at the idea of Neville playing Quidditch. His disastrous first flying lesson was infamous throughout the school, and was a sore point for the shy boy until Harry pointed how it got him out of having to join the team and the ridiculous amount of practice they put in.

"Why do you call Cedric Eddy, Harry?" asked Neville.

"I dunno," said Harry shrugging. "Ever since B1 and B2 doused him with that load of white fairy dust that made him sparkle when he went outside, I can't help but think of him as Eddy. It's really weird actually."

"Well you are pretty weird to begin with, mate," said Ron.

"True," conceded Harry. "Still, I just can't figure why all the girls like him so much. Its unnatural I tell you."

"Anyway," said Ron. "Neville's still having big problems in potions. Since I hear you cop it from Snape too, I thought you might have a suggestion or two for him."

"Professor Snape hates me almost as much as he hates you," said the shy boy.

"I doubt that," laughed Harry.

"Yeah, Nev," said Ron. "He hasn't taken points from you for breathing yet, has he?"

"No, but he did yell at me for turning the page of my book too loudly."

"Chin up, Nev," said Harry. "It's not that bad. Greasy's a bit of a toothless tiger really. He can't fail you out, you know? You just have to pass the owl Exam – nothing else matters."

Finding out exactly what the minimum requirements for obtaining a passing grade in all of his subjects was amongst one of the first things Harry did, since it meant he knew what to concentrate on and what he could really slack off on.

"But how am I going to pass when I've never made a potion right?" asked Neville. "I know I can do it, but I get so nervous with Professor Snape around that I just mess it all up."

"Neville, I'm sorry to say it, but with the rate you blow up potions, I think you need to be more worried about surviving long enough to even sit your exams!" laughed Ron.

"All right, all right. No need to depress him even more, Ron," said Harry, although he was smiling too. "Anyway, I got an idea. Prepare a whole stack of ingredients before hand and keep them in stay-fresh spelled bottles. Cut everything up wrongly in class and let him scream at you about it, but then swap them over for the good stuff when you can. That way you know the ingredients are good and it's one less thing to worry about when making the potion, and it'll drive Greasy nuts the first few times because he won't be able to figure out how you did it."

"That's a good idea," said Ron, once again impressed by Harry's ingenuity. "Do you do that?"

"Not anymore," said Harry sadly. "Greasy caught me after he said the first person to make a Pepper up potion correctly could leave early and I finished in three minutes."

"He tricked you," said Neville, outraged. "He'd never let somebody out early, not even a Slytherin."

"Probably, but it's okay because I got him back," said Harry, amused at Neville's indignation.

"How?"

"I licensed the design of my self-stirrers to one of the fourth years' dads. He runs an Apothecary and is selling them hand over fist apparently."

"How's that getting him back?" asked Ron. "I mean I know it means you are making a galleon out of something the git made you stop using, but it's not really getting him back, is it?"

"We agreed to call them 'Snape-stirrers'" said Harry, grinning, "and we added a warning against people with greasy hair using them."

#

"Mister Potter," called Professor Sprout over the edge of the balcony.

"Yes, Professor?" asked Harry, floating back up to where she was standing.

"Are you aware there are rules against flying in the corridors?"

"Yes, Professor, one of the prefects explained that to me, but technically I am not flying in the corridors," Harry answered. "I am flying the void of the stairwells,"

The normally easy-going Head of House gave Harry a very stern, no-nonsense look. Harry had the decency to look a bit ashamed.

"Detention?" he asked.

"Oh yes," she replied.

Harry sighed and flew over the balustrade to land next to the professor.

"Care to explain?" she asked, watching him expertly dismount.

"Something went wrong with my shoelace tying Rune and my laces tied together while I was at the top of the stairs," said Harry. "I would have fallen down if it wasn't for the fact my bag was charmed to be light enough to float and it took my weight."

"So you decided not to walk down the stairs anymore, and to fly down on a personal broom instead?"

Harry shuffled his feet, for the first time feeling a bit embarrassed at one of his weak excuses.

"Well, yeah, although truthfully I am more interested in the going up bit. Going down is pretty easy, and I borrowed that broom from a fifth year, so please don't confiscate it."

Professor Sprout's expression softened.

"I see. Well, nevertheless, you broke an important school rule. See me after your last class today."

"I was being careful," protested Harry.

"Yes, and don't think I didn't notice how well you were flying, especially when that book fell out of your bag and you caught it, that's why your detention tonight will not be anything you are used to."

She stopped for a moment, as if trying to decide how to explain further.

"Tell me Harry," she continued after a moment. "How much do you know about Quidditch?"

#

Cedric was ready to pull his hair out.

On one hand, Potter was a natural in the air. His skill on a rickety old school broom was incredible. He managed to catch every ball Cedric threw, somehow moving into exactly the right spot to easily snatch them out of the air with the minimum of effort.

On the other hand, he was being as thick as a Troll's club – possibly on purpose.

"No, no, no," said Cedric. "The Beaters hit the Bludgers with their bats."

"But I don't want anybody hitting me!" protested Harry.

"Not that kind of bludger. This," Cedric said, holding up one of the balls for Harry to see, "is a Bludger."

"I still don't see what that has to do with me, if I am meant to be training to be a seeker like you."

Cedric rubbed his forehead and suddenly understood why it had been left up to him to explain the game to Harry, rather than one of the older teammates, or the captain – nobody else wanted the job and he was currently the 'low man' on the team.

"You need to know the rules," he said.

"Why? The way I see it, all I need to do is catch the little golden thingy and then it's game over, right?"

"Yes, but – you know what? Bugger it. You're right. Just catch the little golden thingy, and make sure not to get in anybody's way or get knocked off your broom, okay?"

"Fine," said Harry. "Can I go in yet?"

Harry just didn't understand why some people insisted on making things a lot more complicated than they needed to be, but at least now he had a half decent reason to buy his own broom, even if he couldn't use it inside.

"Just give me a hand to put the equipment back in the shed," said Cedric.

"All right," said Harry. "Just don't bite me," he added without thinking.

"Okay - no wait, what?"

#

"It's the Philosopher's Stone," said Hermione taking a seat next to Harry.

By now Harry pretty much knew everybody's name, but preferred to stick with his easier to remember nicknames. He did stop calling Hermione 'Fuzzy' as soon as she asked him not to do it anymore; something nobody else had thought of doing when he used his nicknames for them.

"No, it's a pair of glasses I picked up from my local second hand shop ages ago to keep as spares," said Harry, not looking up from his work.

"Not that, the thing that Dumbledore is hiding in the school. It's the fabled Philosopher's Stone, created by Nicholas Flamel, who, incidentally, once worked with Dumbledore."

Harry carefully put down the spare pair of glasses.

"I'm sure you are speaking English, but for life of me, I just can't understand what you are saying. Is it some sort of spell, or have I gone mad? Or have you gone mad? That's it isn't it? You've finally cracked. I told you the self-inflicted pressure was going to get you now you've lost your mind and will end up sitting in a corner for the rest of your life drooling on yourself and getting spoon fed. Actually, that doesn't sound that bad."

"Honestly, Harry," huffed Hermione, again choosing to ignore his good natured mocking. "Remember, the dog that nearly ate us when we got lost? You know, the one with three heads?"

"Fluffy? And for the record I wasn't lost, I was just exploring alternative routes. You were lost."

"Whatever. I still say you were just as lost as us but won't admit it because that would mean you haven't figured the moving stairs out yet. Anyway, do you recall Fluffy was standing on a trap door?"

"If I said 'yes, of course', would you believe me?"

"And have you forgotten all about the Gringotts break-in and the thing Hagrid removed from that particular vault just that morning."

"No, but I've tried pretty hard to," answered Harry.

"Well I figured it all out," said Hermione, looking very smug. "Dumbledore knows somebody is after the Philosopher's Stone, so he took it from Gringotts and hid it under that trapdoor. Several of the teachers have put protections in place to stop it being stolen, the first being Fluffy."

"Excellent," he said. "I guess I'll have to start calling you Watson now."

"As in 'Elementary my dear Watson', right?" she asked. "No thank you."

"You are just too clever sometimes, you know that?" said Harry smiling and picking up his glasses to begin working on them again.

"Harry!" said Hermione.

"What? You figured it out, great, I'm really impressed, honestly, but what has it got to do with us?"

Hermione sighed again, knowing Harry was probably just as interested, but was never going to show it, since it might mean having to do something.

"What are you doing with those glasses?" she asked, deciding to let the matter drop for the moment. "They look identical to the ones you are wearing."

"Pretty good, eh? I asked a sixth year to make them like that for me, and I am going to enchant them."

"What are you going to do? Make them so you can have them work like binoculars? Or let you see in the dark? Or maybe let you see magic! Oh, let me look please? Hang on. Harry, this is a book about the spells needed to make portraits move. It's quite advanced magic."

"Yep," he said. "I can't cast any of these spells, but I'll just find the ones I need, and then I'll get somebody else to do it for me."

"Do what, exactly?" she asked.

Harry held up the glasses again, and Hermione could just make out the carefully drawn outlines of a pair of eyes sketched on the lenses.

"Nobody is ever going to catch me sleeping because they can see my eyes are closed," he said proudly.

Hermione groaned and shook her head sadly.

"If only you used your powers for good," she lamented mournfully.

#

One day on his way to Transfiguration, via a 'shortcut' of course, Harry was brought to a halt by a quiet voice calling him, despite the fact the corridor appeared to be very empty.

"Psssst. Mr Harry Potter sir!"

Harry stumbled to a stop, entirely uncertain why a suit of armour was apparently whispering to him. For a moment he considered ignoring it, like he did so many other things that would probably turn out to be inconvenient, but the chances were the voice would follow him around and drive him nuts, if he wasn't already.

"Hello?" he said to the armour, unsure of the proper way to go about addressing a weapon of war. "Can I help you?"

Since it had a ruddy great sword, he figured it was better to be safe and try for politeness. Knights wore armour, and they were meant to be chivalrous and stuff, so hopefully it wouldn't try to hack his head off for not bowing or something.

"Down here," said the voice. "Behinds the steel mans."

Harry cautiously leaned to the side to get a good look at who, or what, was calling him from the shadow of the suit. He kept a firm grip on his book bag, in case whatever it was needed a good whacking.

It was a House-elf.

"Pickles?" asked Harry.

"Me's not Pickles, sir. Me is Friese," said the elf, who he could now see was a lot younger than the first elf he had talked into doing his laundry and several other menial tasks.

"Sorry, Friese, I'm not much good with names, but what can I do for you?"

"The elveses in the kitchen been saying you is the wizard to go to when we is wanting work."

"Eh?"

"Friese is needing extra work. Friese is a good elf, but there is never enough work to go around, and Friese is not wanting to leave Hoggywarts."

The elf paused for a moment, looking around fearfully as if to check that nobody could overhear them, and then continued in a hoarse whisper.

"Other elveses whisper to Friese and tellses him Harry Potter is a good wizard who can get what Friese's be needing, even though Harry Potter sir is not Friese's owner. They says Harry Potter sir pretends to be a very lazy wizard but appreciates elves cleaning up for him and is always busy doing something."

Harry automatically made to protest but hesitated, unsure what it was he was going to protest against. Friese went on in an almost pleading tone filled with hope.

"Please be helping Friese. Harry Potter sir is always coming up with new things for Pickles to be doing. Friese was hoping Harry Potter sir could do the same for him."

The elf looked very eager and excited.

"Ah, excuse me for a moment," said Harry taking a step back.

He looked up and down the corridor, checking to make sure somebody wasn't playing a joke, then pinched himself, really hard.

Nope, that hurt, which meant he wasn't asleep somewhere dreaming that dream again, and he really did have another elf begging him for work.

"This is just too good to be true," he mumbled to himself, a smile beaming from his face.

#

Hagrid's invite to 'witness something you'll not likely see again' had Harry a bit worried.

Hermione mentioned, several dozen times in fact, how she noticed the Keeper of the Keys acting strangely, well, stranger than normal. Skulking around the library was not the sort of activity Harry had come to expect from the outdoorsman.

So it was with a bit of trepidation that he ventured down to the hut at the edge of the forest and knocked, flying down under his cloak to make sure nobody spotted him going outside so close to curfew. His housemates would notice he was missing, but their sense of loyalty would stop anybody from ratting him out until much later.

Having people willing to cover for him was an unexpected surprise for Harry, especially since he hadn't really done that much to help them. All he did was show a few of them some shortcuts and time saving things he picked up, and he only really did that because he couldn't stand to see them working so much harder than they needed to, and now they were willing to help him out in the most unexpected ways.

Whatever the reason, it was nice to have a few people covering his back, and they saved him a lot of effort at times. Having a broom also saved him a lot of work, especially with long treks like this one.

"Who's there?" boomed Hagrid's voice from behind the closed door when Harry knocked.

"Keep it down, Hagrid," said Harry, lifting the cloak up so he could be seen.

Hagrid opened the door pulled Harry inside the swelteringly hot cottage.

"What is that?" asked Harry, peering into the large pot Hagrid had suspended over the roaring fire.

"That there is what I've got you down 'ere to see," said Hagrid, swinging the pot out and then removing a large egg-shaped thing. His hands were wearing the most enormous pair of mittens Harry had ever seen.

Moving quickly, as the heat was obviously penetrating his gloves, Hagrid put the thing onto the table, and Harry realised it wasn't just egg-shaped, it was an actual egg.

A very large, red-hot egg, and it was moving of its own accord, like something inside was struggling to get out.

Before he had a chance to say anything, a loud cracking noise came out of the egg and a series of fine breaks suddenly appeared all over it.

With another loud crack, a piece of the shell popped off, fell onto the table, and promptly burst into flame. Hagrid absently patted it out while watching the egg excitedly, not noticing his gloves catching fire and needing to also be put out.

From the new hole in the egg, there came a wet, wretched sound, worse than any fur ball hacking coughing of Mrs. Figg's oldest cat, Mr Tibbles, who was known to cause other cats to flee in terror and disgust during some of his more memorable choking sessions.

A sharply taloned claw rose from the hole and gripped the edge, and then a head straight out of a nightmare slowly emerged and emitted a barking cough, punctuated by sprays of yellow goo flying every which way.

Leathery and scaly, the head seemed to be all fangs, except for two beady, yellow eyes, which latched onto the sight of Harry and started menacingly tracking him the way a cobra might watch a mouse.

"Isn't he beautiful?" cried Hagrid in an emotion filled voice, actual tears rolling down his face as the lizardy-thing fought its way out of the quickly disintegrating egg. "Norwegian Ridgeback I reckon. I'm going to call him Norbert."

"Ridgeback? Isn't that some sort of dragon?" said Harry, unable to tear his eyes away from the tiny, savage looking monstrosity trying to stand up for the first time. "Where did you manage to get a hold of a dragon's egg?"

"I won him in a card game," said Hagrid, as the beast latched onto one of his mitten covered fingers and tried its best to tear the digit off, probably to eat it. "Oh look, he knows who his mummy is."

For a moment Harry was tempted to ask what Hagrid had put up for his stake to match a dragon egg, but then he figured knowing was probably too much trouble, in the long run.

"Hagrid, do you have any idea just how much work owning a pet like that is going to be? This isn't like the other animals you take care of, this is a dragon – a beast that is probably going to grow very large very quickly, and will likely need a whole lot more attention than a dog," he said, nodding over to where Fang was sensibly hiding under its blankets. "Just feeding it until it can hunt for itself is going to be a full time job, and then you are going to have to make sure it doesn't hunt people!"

Despite his recent experience with Hedwig, and what he had picked up about how easy Ron's rat was to look after, Harry still had some pretty definite ideas about the amount of work involved when it came to responsibility for others under your care. Ms Figg's cats were easy going, but still needed inordinate amounts of grooming and attention from the batty old girl, and that was when things were running smoothly!

Hagrid looked a bit worried for a moment, but shrugged it off.

"Nah, it'll be 'right,'" said the Groundskeeper dismissively.

Taking off his gloves, he picked up a large piece of raw meat and used it to entice the baby dragon away from the mutilated remains of the finger it was mauling. With a little mewling roar, and to Hagrid's delight, the dragon sent a burst of flame at the meat and then leapt onto it with gusto, sinking its sharply toothed maw deep into the slightly scorched flesh while its claws grabbed the rest in a death grip.

"Well I just hope Flo is stocked up on bandages and burn cream for you," said Harry, "and that you've had Beardy put some damn good fire protection spells on everything around here."

"Flo? Who's that?" asked Hagrid, still cooing over the savage butchering of the meat by his new pet.

"Flo, short for Florence Nightingale, you know, the Nurse," explained Harry still unable to look away from the fascinating sight of the dragon tearing into the lump of bloody flesh that was several times bigger than itself. "I'm surprised you didn't have Beardy or Kettle down here to watch too. I thought they'd have loved this."

Watching Norbert decimate the bleeding flesh in a frenzy of violence, Harry didn't notice Hagrid's uncomfortable silence at his comments.

#

Thanks again to the AFC guys, especially BennyS. A few reviewers gave me some good ideas too - you know who you are - Thanks.

Chapter Four – the Year of living Slothfully

Harry loved flying. His enjoyment went beyond merely saving him from having to walk; it was one of the very few activities he really liked that didn't involve lying down.

It was quite a bit of fun to every now and then drop down to the levels of the others and zoom around the pitch, dodging balls and players, and even though it was far more strenuous than anything else he chose to do, it could hardly be considered work.

Getting drafted into the 'Puff Quidditch team in the rare position of reserve gave him lots of extra opportunities to fly, although he was usually meant to be flying practice drills.

Drills were quite boring and meaningless to Harry, when all he really had to do was find and catch the snitch.

Not that he minded, and the exercise meant he could worry a little bit less about getting fat. Merlin knew it would be a lot more trouble to carry a huge amount of extra weight around.

That had never been a problem at Privet drive where his food intake matched his energy output pretty evenly (only because Dudley was too stupid to notice his food stashes often mysteriously being seriously depleted), but Hogwarts meals had tipped the balance badly.

Luckily, Harry had the sort of metabolism that kept him slim, but he knew from watching Dudley and Vernon waddle around that getting humongous meant everything was much harder to do, so it was something to avoid, and he enjoyed eating too much to diet!

"Potter!" yelled the seventh year team captain, as he came zooming up to where Harry was casually floating above the other players.
"Why the bleeding blazes aren't you flying the pattern the way I showed you?"

"Well, Cap," said Harry. "There doesn't seem much point to it, really."

"No point? No Point? That pattern has been proven again and again to be the most effective one in the world!" said Cap, getting more agitated as he spoke. "Every major league has its own variation, but the basic pattern is the same. You need to be able to do it flawlessly-"

"I thought I just had to catch the snitch," interrupted Harry, holding up the little golden ball.

"And you'll only do that if you —"

The captain stopped, momentarily dumbstruck.

"When did you get that?" he finally asked.

"About five minutes after we got out here," answered Harry, "but I figured you'd want to keep the rest of the team training so I didn't bother you."

#

"How do you keep doing that?" Cedric asked Harry as they made their way back to the locker room. "Every time you turn around the snitch is right there. It's like it wants to be caught or something. Wait, you didn't put a charm on it, did you?"

"Ceddy!" said Harry with mock outrage and using the new hybrid nick name he felt comfortable with. "Are you accusing me of cheating? That's not very Hufflepuff, is it?"

Cedric looked ashamed. "Sorry."

"Maybe I am a Golden Osmagogues attracting the Snitches because they are made to mimic Snidgets, who were fatally attracted to Golden Osmagogues," said Harry.

"You are not a Golden Osmagogues," stated Cedric.

"Well, there is an old saying: 'If you sit by the river long enough, you will see the body of your enemy float by.' " said Harry, trying for a mystical expression, which was hard since he didn't really know what one looked like.

"I really don't think they meant Quidditch when they said that," said Cedric, looking even more doubtful.

"Look, just I figured there is as much chance of the snitch finding me as me finding it, so if I sit still, I'm just as likely to catch it," explained Harry. "It's also likely to confuse the hell out of the opposition."

The older boy knew there was something wrong with Harry's logic, but in the face of seeing it work, he couldn't really dispute it.

"Besides," added Harry, "The balls are all kept locked away in Spike's office. There's no way I can get in to mess with them, not even with an elf helping."

Cedric wasn't sure what to make of the distinct note of regret in Harry's voice, but decided against commenting; fairly certain he really didn't want to know.

#

The reserves benches in the Quidditch stands were not a particularly comfortable place to have a sleep, but Harry persisted. He had plans to one day learn to cast a reverse silencing charm that would keep all the noise out of the secluded and mostly unused space, and his cushioning charm still needed a lot of work, but he made do with what he had and was soon napping away while his teammates battled whatever team was their nemesis this month.

Following the sport felt far too much like study for Harry to really get interested.

After an hour two, Harry was woken up from his snooze by something gently touching his face. He swatted it away, but it kept coming back to bother him.

Finally he got annoyed enough to open his eyes and see a little golden ball with silver wings floating in front of him.

"Shoo. Go away," he said, taking a half hearted swing at it. "I'm not even playing today. Quit bugging me."

The ball hovered closer.

"Harry?" called Han, popping up on the far side of the bench along with Sue. "Who are you talking to?"

At the first sound, the snitch silently fluttered away, darting randomly from side to side too fast to be easily seen.

"Nobody," he answered, choosing not to try to explain the unnatural fascination the odd little things seemed to have for him. "What's up?"

"We thought you might be lonely down here on your own," she answered.

"You got sick of all the cheering, didn't you?" he asked, eyes narrowing in suspicion.

"Maybe a bit," said admitted.

"The game's been going on for over two hours," said Sue. "I hope they find the damn snitch soon - my throat is red raw."

"Yeah, it's like it's hiding or something," agreed Han.

"Hey," said Harry, feeling slightly guilty for some reason and wanting to change the subject. "Want to see something cool?"

"Sure," said Sue.

While he was not renowned for providing overly humorous entertainment, most of Harry's year mates found his antics to be pretty funny, one way or the other.

"I was trying to figure out how I could contribute to this whole 'team spirit' thing-

"Only because Professor Sprout warned you about not joining in on anything," laughed Han.

"-and I remembered seeing a football match on the television a while back at my uncle's house. The crowd did this amazing thing called a 'Mexican Wave', ever heard of it?"

Both girls nodded.

"That's the thing where everybody takes turns standing up, right?"

"Yeah. I thought it looked pretty cool, although Dudders and Vern-pig trying it on the couch was funnier, especially when the poor thing busted apart under them. Well I was thinking it would be really neat to get everybody here to do that."

"That would be pretty hard, wouldn't it?" asked Han. "I mean, how will you get the Slytherins to join in?"

"Is that who we are playing?" said Harry, ignoring the pair's exasperated look and turning to face the stands. "Anyway, I thought so too, but then I remembered that I am a wizard."

He suddenly brought his wand up and twirled it around in a flashy looking pattern before pointing it directly at a portion of the crowd in the stands.

Across from him, directly in front of his wand, the crowd suddenly leapt to their feet. As he quickly swept his wand along, the crowd obediently, and apparently involuntarily, jumped up in a rolling wave. Harry spun right the way around until he was back where he started, and then lowered his wand.

He turned to face the two awestruck girls.

"Pretty good, eh?" he asked, grinning. "You reckon Flower's will count that as contributing?"

"That was amazing," said Sue. "How in the world did you do it?"

"Stinging hex runes on the seats," answered Harry. "Probably never work again, though."

"You drew a Rune on every seat?" asked Han.

"Of course not," answered Harry, turning back to watch the amusing sight of the confused crowd trying to figure out what happened. "I got B1 and B2, those red-headed maniac Gryffs to do it for me."

"It started with a couple of magical ink stampers I bought and got a guy to help me modify to print the Rune, then I convinced the twins

to do the actual stamping by telling them it was for a joke. I don't think they realised I was going to activated it one row at a time, but you've got admit, it looked damn good. Next time I might set them all off at the same moment - what do you think?"

He didn't see Sue cover her face with both hands or Han shake her head, but he knew both girls were smiling.

#

"Come on, Harry, mate. We really need your help," said Ron. "It's for Hagrid after all."

"Just let me get this straight," said Harry. "You found out Tiny was illegally raising a Dragon, mainly because the big guy proudly invited you to have a look, and convinced him to let yet another one of your brothers take it away to a reserve or something, but now you need me to help you and Neville carry it up the to the top of the Astronomy tower in the middle of the night so somebody can pick it up. You need me because nobody else knows about Norb and you don't want Tiny to get into trouble?"

Ron nodded enthusiastically, obviously proud of his plan.

Harry shook his head in despair. Ron was a fairly good bloke, and he enjoyed them spending the odd hour or two slacking off together every now and then, but the redhead was a bit clueless at times. Why he thought Harry would be the slightest bit interested in dragging a heavy, caged baby monster up a very long, steep stairway was beyond Harry's understanding.

Maybe it was because it always seemed he was helping people out by telling them how to go about getting things done the easy way?

"Hagrid said you were there for its birth. I would have loved to have seen that, but I am surprised you didn't say anything to him about it being illegal," said Ron.

"I didn't know," explained Harry. "Besides, it's not my place to tell him what he can or can't do. Anyway, getting back to your plan, I could probably levitate it up by myself so three of us won't have much trouble, but why don't you just get him to cart it to the edge of the forest and get your brother and his mates to pick it up there? It's

not any more likely to be seen than the top of the tallest tower in the school, and it means you don't have to risk being caught out after curfew."

"I figured the tower would be easier to find," said Ron.

"Ron, it's Hogwarts. I reckon anybody with the slightest idea of where the school is will be able to spot a bleeding great castle from the air, and Tiny's hut stands out a bit, since it's the only building anywhere near the ruddy huge forest. Get him to light a fire as a beacon or something and it definitely won't be an issue."

"Yeah, good point," admitted Ron, sounding disappointed.

Seeing the look on Ron's face, Harry felt bad for crushing his idea. Not bad enough to change his mind though. Still, he could try to make up to him a bit.

"Look, I know you liked the idea of a bit of adventure," said Harry, taking pity on his friend, "but you could always sneak out to say goodbye to the bloodthirsty thing. I'll even lend you my broom to get there and back quicker, if you want. Hell, you could fly straight from your dorm window and avoid Giggles and his Fleabag altogether – that'd be pretty cool."

"Thanks, Harry!" said Ron, brightening up. "I appreciate that."

"No problems, mate. Just don't blame me if you get your leg bitten off, all right?"

A few nights later, Harry was dreaming that Wicky was smiling at him while explaining an easy way to make many of his dreams come true.

"So, you see, Mr. Potter, by adding this simple twisty-swirly-poke, you can make any charm permanent!"

"Mr. Potter!" Flitwick's voice was now no longer the small professor's, but a more baritone, yet feminine one. "Mr Potter, wake up!"

Dream receding, Harry's eyes slowly fluttered open. He automatically reached out to grab his glasses and put them on

before looking up to see Flowers, his head of house, scowling down at him.

"Come with me," she said briskly.

Biting down on his tongue to avoid saying something Flowers would likely give him a very harsh reprimand for, he stumbled out of his bed to follow her, half fearful she was going to say something about the fact he was wearing tomorrow's robes to bed instead of pyjamas – not he could tell much difference anyway, and it saved him having to get changed in the morning.

The professor led him halfway across the school and into a room where the head of Gryffindor, Professor McGonagall, and a red-faced Draco awaited.

"Mr. Potter, is this your broom?" Flowers asked, pointing to the broom on McG's desk.

The broom was covered in dirt and sported a few broken bristles, but it was still clearly his since, to the best of his knowledge, it was the only one to have an actual seat attached to it.

"Yes," he said, his apprehension growing.

McGonagall looked down at Harry, a disapproving frown on her face. "Mr. Weasley brought this broom to the infirmary a short time ago. He was very nearly seriously injured when it apparently failed during an unsupervised and unapproved flight he was taking, outside of curfew I might add."

Draco interrupted, "He was flying up to the Astronomy tower to smuggle a dragon out of the country!"

"20 points, Mr. Malfoy, for persisting with that ridiculous tale."

"Is he all right?" asked Harry, ignoring Malfoy, which was practically an automatic habit by now.

"Fortunately, he was only a few feet above the ground when it happened. As it is, he has a broken wrist, a broken nose, and several loose teeth. I will be confiscating this broom at least until we can determine if something happened to it."

"I only added the seat and a couple of cushioning charms," said Harry. "It shouldn't have failed!"

"Nevertheless, it did, and you need to accept and take responsibility for the consequences of your actions in lending it to Mr Weasley," said Flowers.

Harry felt very bad, very bad indeed. He hadn't meant to get Ron hurt, but it was his broom, and he made the modifications himself, despite not really knowing that much about what he was doing.

"Yes, Professor," he agreed quietly.

"Potter tried to kill Weasley," said Draco, sounding oddly respectful.

"Another 10 points, Mr. Malfoy."

#

"I'm really sorry, Harry," said Ron.

Harry wanted to say "Don't worry about it. It's my fault the broom crashed anyway," but all that came out was an extended yawn.

Knowing his detention was scheduled for this night, he had tried to catch a few extra hours of sleep during, but hadn't managed it.

"I still don't know what happened. It was working fine, and then it just went nuts," explained Ron. "Just over there it started. It was weird."

"Stop making excuses for your poor flying, Weasel," said Draco, trudging along behind them. "That broom is one of the finest ever made, there is no way Potter could have accidentally broken it, so you probably crashed it through your own incompetence."

"Get stuffed, Malfoy," said Ron. "At least I'm not here because I am slimy little prick who got busted while dobbling."

Harry could tell Ron's heart wasn't in the rebuke and the red-head actually agreed with Slick, to a degree.

"Face it, Potter's a better flyer than you even though he's barely sat on a broom and doesn't even bother showing up for most of his team's training sessions."

"Hey, I'm only a reserve," protested Harry, fighting another yawn. "Why bother practicing like a madman when I'm not going to play this year? The damn cheering is bad enough. You know that they hold practices, for the cheering? Right there in the middle of the common room, they all get together and practice chanting songs and things! And people call me weird."

"Anyway, really, don't worry about it, Ron. At least I've got a better excuse for not training now. The last one about suddenly being afraid of heights wasn't going to cut it this time, I think."

"Pity about being outside in the middle of the night instead of fast asleep in bed," muttered Draco. "I bet that's annoying, eh Potter?"

"Can it, the lot of you," said Giggles as they neared the small shack. "Hagrid, get out here and take these brats off of my hands. I'll be back to collect what's left of them in a few hours."

Hagrid, carrying a crossbow massive enough to be classified as a siege engine, explained the detention, much to the horror of all three boys.

"The Forbidden Forest? At night?" asked Ron, his voice quavering.

"Wait until my father hears about this," said Draco, looking even paler than usual.

"Walking? For hours and hours," said Harry, horrified. "No way."

"We get the dog," said Draco immediately after Hagrid split them up, deciding to take Ron with him and leaving Draco to Harry.

"He's a ruddy coward," warned Hagrid.

"But hopefully he will look like a better meal than either of us," reasoned Draco.

"Maybe he can carry me when my legs collapse," said Harry, trying to be optimistic.

"Right, you two go tha' way, following tha' trail, and Ron 'n me will go this way. Remember ta send up sparks if you find anythin'."

Harry waited until they could no longer see Hagrid, then promptly walked over to a nearby tree and began climbing it.

"Where are you going?" asked Draco.

"Up. There is no way I am spending the next few hours walking around out here," answered Harry.

"What's the matter, scared?" sneered Draco. "I heard you can't sleep if there is a ghost around."

Harry felt like objecting, but couldn't justify the effort in trying to save face with a guy he didn't really care for about a subject he wasn't interested in discussing.

"Slick, you go prance around the forest looking for whatever it is hunting unicorns," said Harry, trying to get himself comfortable on a branch well above head height. "I'll keep a look out from up here where fewer things are likely to try to eat me."

Any thoughts Draco had about continuing without Harry were quickly dashed when Fang trotted over and began trying to climb the tree as well.

#

"Potter!"

Draco's voice sounded rather hoarse, but it was just loud enough to rouse Harry.

"For Merlin's sake, Slick," he grumbled, shifting to get more comfortable but not opening his eyes. "Just what kind of a piss-weak wizard are you? If you can't climb, use magic!"

"Potter!" Draco practically shouted.

Harry opened his eyes, ready to give the boy a good dressing down, and looked straight into the brightest pair of blue eyes he had ever

seen. Since he was about eight feet off the ground, this was a bit of a shock.

"Eep!" he squealed, and fell out of the tree.

Only the sticking charm he used to keep him from rolling off the branch kept him from a painful fall to the ground, but instead left him hanging, suspended by his robes.

"Harry Potter", said the owner of the eyes, who Harry could now see was either a centaur or a half midget riding a headless horse. "You must leave this forest immediately-"

"Okay," said Harry, releasing his spell to fall the rest of the way, and hit the ground running. "Bye."

He took off running towards Hagrid's cabin, Draco close behind.

"-there is a great danger," finished the centaur before he could stop himself.

But the only one left to answer him was Hagrid's dog, who was trying to hide his head under his front paws while balanced on a tree branch.

By the stars that boy can move when he wants to," said a second Centaur stepping out from behind a tree a short distance away. "Did we miss a meteor in the skies or something?"

"The quality of intruders gets worse every year," sneered a third, darker coloured one.

Fang just whimpered.

#

"The Accio charm? That's a fourth year spell," said the seventh year student manning the charms help desk in the common room. "Do you really think you're up to learning it?"

Harry getting help from the older years in the dorm was a fairly common sight by now, although it was rarely anything to do with his school work – which even more rarely managed to be more than the

absolute minimum required not to fail. The boy-who-couldn't-be-bothered still managed to surprise them with some of his requests sometimes.

"Trust me," said Harry. "I might be inexperienced, but I am really motivated on this one."

"Okay," said the older student, deciding it was only fair to give him a chance.

Some of the others mentioned that Potter came across as a bit of a slacker, but usually got his spells right with only minimal attempts. It was impressive that he was trying to learn advanced spells already, instead of just going along with the standard curriculum. Maybe they had misjudged Harry, since he was obviously putting a lot of effort into getting ahead. Maybe he really was a hard-working 'Puff after all.

Harry watched and listened carefully as the student showed him the incantation and wand movement. He really concentrated, making sure he got every bit of it, as was his habit.

It didn't make sense to get lazy and not pay attention when it counted. All that did was mean a lot more work later on trying to play catch-up, without the benefit of an instructor. Likewise, he rarely practiced the wand movements until he was sure he knew what he was doing. Waving a wand around randomly was a total waste of energy and quite counterproductive, not to mention an eye hazard.

This spell was hard though, and would probably take a lot of practice to get right. Still, being able to summon things from across the room could certainly save him a lot of effort in the long run.

He was very handy with the levitation spell, but it took a lot of work to manoeuvre levitated items over to himself. The Accio spell promised to drag items directly to his hands with just a single concentrated cast; much easier.

Then he just needed to learn how to banish things back to where they came from, and his need to get up and walk all over the place would be halved.

Magic, was just so cool.

#

Harry stood back and examined his latest purchase. The robes he had bought on his sole shopping trip were fine, but decidedly boring. While not having to wear trousers was a welcome bonus, there was something missing from the standard Wizarding-wear.

Namely, magic.

Although modifying the look of the clothes was forbidden by Hogwarts rules (as Slick had discovered, much to his humiliation at having to get his mother to go shopping and buy him a whole new wardrobe), Harry felt there was still a myriad of ways to improve them without violating the strict edicts.

He looked into warming and cooling charms, only to discover the varieties of them available to him were quite incompatible, meaning he either had to have different robes for different weather conditions, or he needed to remember to turn off one set of charms before turning on the other.

Worse yet, none of the charms were particularly good at automatically maintain him at a comfortable temperature and required constant adjustment.

Abandoning that line of thought (for the moment), Harry's next idea turned out to be quite practical and easy to manage.

With a little bit of tricky charm work by one of the Ravenclaw seventh years, Harry's pockets were now large enough for him to put a huge pile of his books and materials in, and the robes stayed weighing exactly the same as before – practically nothing.

Of course his book bag already weighed nothing, in fact it sometimes had an annoying tendency to try to float away in even the lightest of breezes, but being able to put almost everything he owned into his pockets meant not having to work out what books and things he needed for that particular day – he just loaded up everything and went on his way.

The only downside was learning the trick of being able to find where things were without having to rummage around a lot. He was getting

better at that- good enough to not be too worried by the small effort required.

There were many other things Harry planned to do with his clothes, but he had yet to make much progress on getting what he wanted. Ideally they would be self ironing, self cleaning, and automatically repairing, but as one of his closer housemates, Sue, pointed out, he was planning a lot of effort that would be wasted.

"Because you'll grow out of them," she said, putting an almost instant stop to his efforts. "Then you'll have to get it all done again with the next set. I mean your existing ones are already starting to get a bit short. I'd be surprised if they fit by the middle of next year."

Disappointed, but not crushed, Harry decided she was right and he would be a fool to spend too much effort on his existing robes, unless he could figure out how to make them grow along with him. The enlarging charm proved to be easy to cast, but useless as it tended to only enlarge one small part of the robes at a time, possibly due to Harry not being that proficient at it.

Still, the pockets were worth doing and a valuable additional that he would likely get done again and again until he could cast the spells himself.

Of course, his current robes were still in a very sellable condition, and the pockets just made them more so, since nobody else he knew had any magically enhanced clothes – not even Slick and his designer pyjamas had anything obviously magical about them.

Mind you, if what Hagrid told him before school started was true, just being pre-owned by 'Harry Potter' put the price he could expect to get for them much higher than what he originally paid, which could possibly fund getting the charms he wanted cast on his new set.

Then the only problem was timing it right so that he wasn't left standing naked in the alley.

#

With exams approaching, Harry found it increasingly difficult to get anybody to help with his numerous side projects. Even some of the

elves were starting to feel the pressure of so much tension in the castle as the older years prepared for some of the most important tests of their lives.

The extra work created by nervous children making mistakes filled in the gap Harry had been happily using to have the elves do things he thought would keep them happy, and help him out (like secretly scrubbing unused areas Giggles was likely to use for detentions and only leaving a thin layer of dirt for the students to clean).

The younger years were spared most of the direct pressure, but their first round of tests, along with the nerves of the older students, made them all a bit tense.

So Harry developed a new way to avoid the general mayhem and stress enveloping the school.

He would sit crossed-legged in a corner of the common room, rest his hands on his knees, put an open book in his lap, and pretended to meditate. It actually first started when he began trying to train himself to subconsciously control the sleep-walking curse he used for detentions, but had grown into an improvement on his ability to instantly take a nap.

Slowing his breathing down to a fraction of its normal rate not only saved him the terrible effort of having to breathe as much, but helped him easily slip into a sort of entranced sleep. It worked well enough too, especially when he remembered to cast stiffening spells on his shirt's back to keep him upright, and when he could put cushions all around to keep comfortable.

All in all, he thought it was quite clever, so it was rather a shock to wake up one day and find several other people sitting in identical poses in a circle around him.

"Very funny," he said, causing the others to give up their fake posing and grin widely.

"Come on mate," said a smiling Zac. "You got to admit, you really weren't fooling anybody."

"What gave me away?" he asked.

"The snoring," answered Sue and Han at the same time.

#

When the first of the exams finally arrived, it was a relief for them all.

Firstly because most of his housemates had worked together to make sure all of them were as prepared as possible, but mainly because Harry could finally look forward to saying "I told you so," to Sue and Hermione – the worst of the people badgering him to study all the time.

Neither they nor the teachers appreciated that Harry had never known a single person in the world who cared what his report card looked like. They expected him to want to please somebody, to be proud of getting good marks, even if that somebody was only himself, but in reality, that 'need' had been broken in him long before Hogwarts.

He believed it was not a good plan to fail, mainly because that usually lead to remedial classes and extra supervised instruction that was much harder to slack off in, but he wasn't going to strive for excellence, or even above-averageness.

Surprisingly, and quite uncharacteristically, Harry found himself feeling nervous as he sat down for his first exam, Astronomy.

"Please be multiple choice. Please be multiple choice. Please be multiple choice," he chanted to himself in his own private little mantra while waiting for the special anti-cheat quills and exam papers to be handed out.

Multiple choice questions were definitely easier, so naturally they were his favourite type of test.

Not that he had any evidence the mantra ever having made any difference in his Muggle school, but he always felt better for trying.

"Yes!" he exclaimed a little too loudly after flipping the paper over to find his wish was granted.

At least half of the paper was multiple choice, so at least half of the answers were on the page in front of him just waiting to be selected.

While memorising reams of facts about planets and other celestial bodies was tedious, boring, and usually took quite a lot of effort, Harry had always made use of memory short cuts when he could.

"Most Voters Earn Money Just Showing Up Near Polls," he whispered to himself when required to list the planets in order.

There were dozens of mnemonics that used the first letter of each planet to make a memorable sentence, but he was always partial to that one, possibly because Vernon's constant ranting about politics made it easier to recall.

For some inexplicable reason, "Avoiding Tiring Gambols Can Let Very Lazy Students Sleep Continuously All Period" stuck in Harry's head as the way to recall the zodiac, probably due to the appropriateness of its sentiment.

He had others too, covering most of the information they had studied throughout the year, although often it was hard to find or make up ones that he could relate to without effort.

Not that he had any particular interest in a subject that regularly required him to be out of bed at ungodly hours, but most of it was just pure memorisation - hardly any work at all really.

#

Being asked to make a pineapple dance for Charms was harder, since it involved techniques and spells they had learned, but using them in a way they were never directly shown before.

Luckily, Harry was quite familiar and practiced with the spells needed, since he was fascinated by the idea of making normally inanimate object move on their own with little or no effort from him.

Specifically he had been trying to teach a broom to sweep the floor, but the damn thing kept running off to find a bucket and water for some reason.

Still, the experimenting he performed trying to get it to work made the exam a cinch. He probably could have earned extra credit by making the pineapple peel and slice itself into pieces, but he couldn't

see the need to make the effort, and Han used to freak out whenever he practiced that in the common room with various vegetables.

She obviously never had to peel potatoes herself by hand, or she would have appreciated his skill, rather than scream at him for the 'horrific self mutilating and suicide' his practicing on fruit entailed.

The other guys in 'Puff thought it was quite funny to watch.

#

"Turn this mouse into a snuff box," instructed Professor McGonagall when it was time for the practical portion of transfiguration.

Harry knew he had done poorly on the theory side of the subject, since he only really wanted to understand the use of the magic and not the metaphysical stuff behind it. He wasn't too worried about failing the practical, but it went against his nature to just do what he was asked without some attempt at avoidance.

"That's a bit cruel, isn't it?" he asked.

"I assure you that I will be able to reverse anything you do," she answered.

"Are you going to wipe the mouse's memory?" he persisted. "I mean it's all well and good that you'll make sure it's going to be a mouse again, but what if it's traumatised and gets sudden urges to snort tobacco or run up somebody's nose or something? I don't think I'd like to have that on my conscious, Professor."

"Mr Potter, I am well aware that you are perfectly capable of performing this spell," said McGonagall "So what is-"

"Oh, well I guess we are done then," interrupted Harry, turning and leaving the classroom, a huge smile on his face. "Thank you."

He actually made it two steps out of the door before his teacher found her voice and called him back.

#

"Potter, where is your forgetfulness potion?" snapped Greasy as Harry was about to leave after the exam.

"My what?" he asked, making sure to stick to his 'I'm Innocent' voice and expression, mainly because he knew it annoyed the hell out of Greasy and not because he thought it would get him any leeway.

"The concoction you have been supposedly working on for the last hour. Where is it?"

"Er, I don't know?" said Harry, looking confused.

"Cease stalling, Potter, and hand it in," said Snape, holding out his hand. "I can see you have the vial in your hand."

Harry looked at the vial, seemingly surprised it was there.

"It's empty," he said, holding it up for the teacher to see.

"I can see that, you idiot boy. What have you done with it?"

"Ah, I think maybe I drank it," said Harry, licking his lips, apparently tasting something on them. "Hey, if I did, and I can't remember it, that must mean it worked, right?"

He knew he wasn't going to get away with it, but it sure beat the hell out of actually going to the effort of trying hard to make the potion and getting a failing mark anyway.

Especially when Greasy looked like he was going to pop a blood vessel.

#

Defence had them regurgitating more information and facts about various Dark Creatures, Dark Spells, Dark Wizards, and Dark Blue, although Harry was fairly certain he hallucinated the last bit after he developed a splitting headache halfway through the class when Garlic Guy stood too close and his stench almost overwhelmed them.

He didn't expect to do well on that one.

Herbology was a breeze, since the theory was all about various fungi and their uses, and the practical was all about planting, potting, and pruning.

While the exact species were significantly different, the actual methods and ideas were sufficiently similar to his Muggle gardening experience that Harry was sure it would turn out to be his best subject, exam-wise. He had been told it was very different in later years, but for now he was happy with his effort.

He was then pleasantly surprised to find the History of magic exam was actually an hour to write some answers for questions about one of his few Wizarding heroes, Gaspard Shingleton, the man who invented self-stirring cauldrons.

Since Harry had read extensively about Gassy while researching his Snape-stirrers, he finished the whole exam in under thirty minutes and was certain he would get a great mark.

It was a brilliant way to top off a demanding day, and it left Harry feeling unusually energised, although the nagging headache could also have contributed to his restlessness.

Harry felt so enthused by his performance in the exams, and the fact they were over, that he decided to take one of his rare after-curfew jaunts to check on one of his other promising projects.

This idea, surprisingly enough, he had to thank Vernon for. Once, and once only, the pig-man took Harry with him to Grunnings, the drill manufacturing plant where Vernon worked.

Being a year or three younger than he currently was, Harry was uncertain about the exact circumstances and why's of his visit, but he vaguely recalled something about possibly meeting some burglars or rioters, or rioting burglars, or maybe it was being a meat shield for Vernon against rioters.

At any rate, Harry got a late night look into the behind the scenes workings of Grunnings, and the memory came in handy now.

Hiding his project in one of the empty classrooms along the out of bounds third floor corridor was, in Harry's opinion, a stroke of genius.

Nobody was allowed up there, not even the prefects, so Harry ran a much smaller risk of getting discovered.

So far he had only ever seen Giggles and Fleabag prowling anywhere near the place, and Fluffy's growls whenever Fleabag was around worked well to keep their visits infrequent.

It was therefore a complete surprise to be literally run into by Ron while closing the door behind him as he left his project's hiding room.

Falling to the floor in a tangle of arms and legs, it took them several moments to sort themselves out, despite Hermione's attempts to help.

"What are you doing up here?" asked Ron. "You've come to save it too, haven't you?"

"What?" asked Harry, still rubbing his sore head. "Save what? Where?"

"The Stone, Harry," said Hermione. "We think somebody-

"Snape," interrupted Ron.

"Is going to try and get it tonight," finished Hermione, with an annoyed glance at Ron. "We have to stop them."

"No we don't," said Harry.

"We can't just let whoever it is down there get the stone," insisted Hermione.

"It's got nothing to do with us," said Harry. "Go tell a professor."

"We tried," said Hermione, sounding very peeved. "Professor McGonagall told us not to worry and that it was all taken care of."

"So there you go, nothing to worry about then," said Harry.

"But mate, what if it's Snape?" asked Ron. "Do you really want him to be able to turn lead into gold?"

Harry was still uncertain how or why Hermione had forgiven the redhead for his part in the Halloween thing, or how he had been drawn into Hermione's crusade to protect the stone.

"Then he'll be able to retire and I won't have to see him ever again," said Harry. "Goodnight."

He pulled the cloak back over his head and started to walk away, but Hermione's next words stopped him cold

"Then what were you doing up here?" she asked. "What's in that room, Harry?"

Before he could tell her to stop, she pushed the door to his project room open and looked inside.

"Oh, Merlin," said Hermione. "Is this what I think it is?"

Ron stuck his head over her shoulder.

Row upon row of tables were crammed into the former classroom, and along both sides of each row, sitting so close to each other to be touching even with their elbows held in close, sat smiling House-elves; dozens of them. Each one had a ball of yarn on a spindle in front of them, and they were all knitting furiously.

With almost mechanical regularity, an elf would finish his work, and a completed sock would float down the length of the table to land in basket sitting at the end. A large score board hung against one wall, with a couple of elves scurrying along updating the tallies for each elf as they worked.

A few glanced up at the trio's entrance, but they barely paused in their knitting.

"What?" Ron asked. "It's just a bunch of House-elves."

"It's a sweat-shop, Ron," said Hermione, striding into the room, "and look at what they are making."

She reached over to one of the many lines of tables filled with House-elves knitting furiously and picked a sock out of the basket sitting at the end.

"Socks," she said. "You've got the Hogwarts House-elves making socks?"

"Monogrammed socks," said Harry proudly. "I'm going to sell them in Diagon Alley."

"Are you paying them to make these?" asked Hermione

Harry sighed. One of his biggest regrets was sharing what he knew about house-elves with her. He had been eager to show off how he had managed to get around the silly Hufflepuff restrictions and foolishly thought she would appreciate his cunning.

Instead she became indignant at the use of House-elves and ranted for long enough to convince him never to talk to her about them again.

"I thought not," she said at Harry's exasperated sigh.

"I've told you before," Harry said. "They want to work. They need to work. They get the shakes and go stir crazy if there is not enough work."

"That because they have never been shown another way," she insisted.

"No it's because they love it," countered Harry.

"This is slave labour," she said, holding up a sock to emphasise her point.

"No, it's a voluntary self-help thing," he answered, snatching the sock to inspect the stylised, gold HP monogram. "I'm not forcing them here, they can leave or take a break at any time they want, and nobody punishes them for anything. Isn't that right guys, and girls?"

Not stopping for a moment, the elves burst into a loud round of happy agreement.

"But you are using them to make cheap socks!"

"Hey, these are not 'cheap socks'. These are high quality, well they are now that they have learned how to knit. The first few hundred weren't much good for anything except maybe the horsey guys, Tiny, or something with about two dozen toes - and you don't want me to start on the disaster the gloves and beanies were. "

"Where are you even getting the wool from?" asked Hermione.

At that precise moment, a sheep's quiet 'baa' echoed from somewhere near the back of the crammed room.

"Hey these are pretty good," said Ron behind them, interrupting the argument. They turned to find him walking in a small circle to test out the new pair of socks he was suddenly wearing. "They're really comfortable."

"Look, it's got nothing to do with you," said Harry, deciding to ignore Ron, for now. "Haven't you got to get a sorcerer's rocks off or something?"

Hermione looked ready to keep arguing, but then suddenly stopped.

"Yes," she said, a cunning gleam in her eye, "and you're coming with us."

"What, why? You are so not blackmailing me, are you?"

Hermione grinned, slightly evilly, in Harry's opinion.

"They are not actually your elves, are they, Harry? So anything they make is technically not yours, is it?"

"Can I grab a couple of pairs before we go?" asked Ron.

#

"Okay," said Harry, once the door to Fluffy's room was unlocked. "Wait here and I'll have a quick look."

"No way," said Hermione. "You can't do it alone, and we can all fit under that cloak, but it would be better if we could make some music of some sort to put Fluffy to sleep."

"What makes you think music is going to put it to sleep?" asked Harry. "I can't believe your singing is that boring, unless you sang about really boring things, like books, or studying, or-"

"We tricked Hagrid into telling us," said Ron excitedly. "He said he used to put it asleep all the time just by playing a bit of music."

"Brilliant. What kind of music?" asked Harry. "I mean you don't want to go in there singing a nice lullaby when what it really wants is some heavy rock or jazz or something, do you?"

An uncomfortable silence answered Harry.

"You have no clue, do you?"

"He said any music," said Ron.

"Any music? Are you sure?"

Ron nodded vigorously, and completely unconvincingly.

"Well I did get this from Tiny for Christmas," said Harry, reaching into one of his voluminous magical pockets to draw out his hand carved flute. "I thought it was a bit odd at the time, but I wonder if he thought I might need it or something. Only problem is I've never bothered to learn how to play. Can either of you?"

Both of the Gryffindors shook their heads.

"Harry, why are you carrying an instrument you can't play around in your pocket?" asked Hermione.

"I've gotten just about everything I own in my pockets now," said Harry proudly. "And the pockets are held on with Velcro, so I can just swap them from robe to robe - saves a lot of hassle."

"Yeah, I can see that," agreed Ron. "Anyway, you play that pipe thing of yours-"

"It's called a flute, Ronald," said Hermione.

"Whatever. You play it, and we'll wait to see if it puts the dog to sleep, then we'll all go in, lift the trapdoor and jump in. Okay?"

Once all of them were squeezed under the cloak, Harry began blowing semi-random notes on Hagrid's hand-made flute in what he hoped sounded enough like 'Teddy bear's picnic' to put the huge animal to sleep.

With a nod, he indicated for Ron to open the door, and then they awkwardly shuffled through into the room where the massive three-headed dog was slowly sinking down into a deep slumber.

"What's that?" asked Hermione in a hushed voice, pointing towards something sticking out from under one of the beast's massive paws.

"Looks like a Harp," whispered Ron as the trio slowly crept closer to the sleeping giant and the closed trap door. "Whoever is down there must have left it behind, playing to keep Fluffy asleep I'll bet. It probably ran out of magic and got chewed up."

Ron reached for the lifting ring of the trap door, only to have Harry stamp his foot down on the door, holding it shut. Both Ron and Hermione looked at Harry in surprise. With one hand helping to make almost random noises on the flute, he reached down with his other and slid the unnoticed locking bolt into place, then jammed a broken piece of the harp behind to keep it from being opened by a simple Alohorama.

With meaningful nods of his head, he ushered the other two back outside, and then closed the door behind them and took the cloak off.

"What?" he said when they looked at him in disbelief. "You don't think the door and bolt will be magically strong?"

"Yes, but that might only slow him down," said Hermione. "Not stop him completely."

"That's all we need to do," said Harry. "Now we send a message with Hedwig and let Dumbledore take care of the rest."

Ron smiled happily, glad to be getting out of harm's way, but Hermione frowned, torn between her desire to stop the thief, and her faith in the Headmaster.

"Tell you what," said Harry. "I'll stay here and guard the door while you go to send off a message. Ron can try to get another professor to come and see that somebody has gone into the room, okay?"

Hermione nodded and immediately rushed off.

"Be careful," she called back over her shoulder.

"Yeah, don't do anything stupid," said Ron, also heading off.

Harry laughed and plonked down against the door. He pulled his invisibility cloak over himself and got comfortable. It wasn't long before he was happily dozing, despite his raging headache. Sleeping in various states of discomfort was another skill he had developed at the Dursleys, so anything less than a blinding migraine barely affected him, only slightly adding to how long it took him to have dreams of an army of House-elves at his beck and call drifting pleasantly through his mind.

Then some bugger opened the door, making him fall into the room, tripped over him, and dropped a ruddy great rock on his head in the process.

Harry untangled himself from his assailant and stood up. He saw the trap door lying open, and Fluffy again snoring peacefully as another Harp played loudly in the corner of the room, but the thief was standing in the doorway, blocking Harry's way out.

"Potter, I expected to see you tonight," said the defence professor, with no sign of his normal stammer.

"Garlic Guy? What the hell?" said Harry, not bothering to try to remember the stuttering defence professor's real name, especially since his headache suddenly became significantly worse.

"I suppose you expected to find Severus instead? He does seem like the type, doesn't he?"

"Who? Greasy? You have to be joking. Nobody that lame is capable of doing anything remotely cool or clever, like breaking into here."

"Don't play dumb with me, you arrogant brat. All year you've managed to defy me, or did you think I hadn't noticed they way you avoided all of my traps?"

"Traps?" asked Harry, not just stalling for time – he really had no idea what the guy was talking about. "What traps?"

"I coated a cauldron you were to clean for Severus in poison, but you detected it and took the antidote," said the professor.

Harry had to concentrate for a second before the answer came to him.

"So that's what happened to my gloves," he said, recalling the disintegrating precursor to his automatic cleaning brush. "We never did figure out why they fell apart after one use."

"When I noticed you sitting in the same spot at the Slytherin table, I trapped the seat to poison your food. You immediately stopped coming to breakfast and I had to quickly remove the charm to avoid catching somebody else and possibly being exposed."

"You must mean one of the times I managed to convince one of the House-elves to bring me breakfast in bed. Hehe, good times."

"And when I sabotaged your broom," said Garlic Guy, who Harry now recalled had a name beginning with Q and sounding like some small animal or another, "you made the Weasley boy fly it instead – very clever."

"So you're the reason he fell off after visiting Hagrid - and you earned me a detention in the forest. I thought I was doing him a favour lending him the broom after I was banned from riding it in the hallways."

"Yes, I waited to encounter you that night while I fed on the unicorn. I even left a trail of blood to follow, but you didn't take the bait."

"As if," said Harry. "Do you really think I'm barmy enough to go running through the forest at night looking for something killing unicorns? I snuck off and slept in a tree for a few hours."

Something Garlic said triggered a thought in Harry's mind.

"Hang on, my shoes didn't malfunction, did they? It was you. You tied my laces together to try and make me fall down the stairs?"

"Yes, it was I," said Garlic Guy, practically gloating. "It was a foolish attempt I made in a fit of anger, but you usually never took the same stairway twice and I saw an opportunity, so I took it. I still don't know how you avoided crashing to your death."

"What about when I nearly sleep-walked off the Astronomy tower? Was that you too?"

"I watched you for weeks before I had a chance to cast the Imperius curse on you, but you managed to throw it off at the last moment."

"Yeah, well I've gotten pretty good at waking up from trances, but what about that time with the Giant Squid in the lake? It was you trying to make it sink the boat and drag me to bottom wasn't it? I thought it was just playing around thinking the boat was empty while I was catching a nap out where nobody could bother me, but it was you all along."

"What? No I never -"

"And how about the time the snow fort collapse during that battle with Gryffs? Sue and the other 'Puffs said it served me right for hiding in the dungeon of the fort instead of fighting, but you tried to crush me, didn't you?"

"Snow fort? What snow fort?"

"I bet you've even been putting extra cholesterol in my eggs too – not to mention the salt. J's been telling me all along that it's bad for my heart-

"Enough!" yelled the professor, cutting off Harry's stalling. "Give me the stone, Potter, and I'll spare your life."

"Yeah, like I believe that. I might be bone-lazy, but I'm not stupid," he said, clutching the stone to his chest, knowing it was probably the only thing that stood between him and a painful death.

"Give it to me you foolish child!"

Harry was about to explain in great detail how likely that was, when another voice, a hideous rasping voice filled with hatred and contempt, spoke.

"Let me talk to him," said the voice.

Garlic guy objected, but the voice insisted. Turning around, he slowly unwrapped the bandages of the foul smelling turban to reveal a face protruding from the back of his skull, but by then Harry was long gone.

"Where did he go?" asked Quirrell in a panicked voice.

"You fool!" shouted the voice Harry was pretty certain belonged to the Dark Lord, mainly due to the splitting headache suddenly getting significantly worse. "Down the trap door - It's the only way out of the room."

Without another word, the horrible amalgamation of man and thing ran awkwardly to the open trap door and leapt down. A few seconds later, Harry emerged from behind Fluffy, but stayed under his cloak.

He quickly closed the trap door again and then, with some serious concentration, managed to levitate the still snoring Cerberus directly on top of it.

"That ought to stall you some," he said to himself.

Unfortunately the possessed teacher was not fooled for long, and the hatch sprung open again before Harry could get away, flinging Fluffy into the air, yelping in startled surprise. A stray paw connected with Harry, one of its claws tearing into his arm and sending him tumbling backwards.

Harry scrambled not quite fast enough to get back under his cloak before Qmort rose from the hole, swearing in that horrid voice and whimpering in another, more human one.

"Pot-aarrrrghhhggg" screamed Qmort as the now fully awake and rather unhappy three-headed dog pounced on him.

Harry's morbid fascination only lasted long enough for him to see two heads doing a tug-of-war with his former professor while the third kept trying to squeeze in for a bite, then he found himself outside the room closing the door slowly behind him so as not to attract any attention from the mutant mutt.

"I am not going to be able to sleep for a month," he said to himself unhappily. "Well, maybe not for a week, or a few days at any rate - max."

Suddenly the door opened and a bloodied and torn up Qmort stumbled out. Harry caught a glimpse of Fluffy behind the gruesome professor, playing with what looked like a sleeve of Qmort's robes, and it still seemed to have the arm inside.

"Oh hell," Harry yelled, flicking his wand in a bit of a panic to cast the first spell he thought of. "Wingardium Leviosa."

The invisible spell caught the mostly dead Professor by surprise and hoisted him straight into the air. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on your point of view, Harry's control was lacking, and Qmort's rapid ascent came to an abrupt end against the solid stone ceiling of the hallway.

"Oops," said Harry, caught off guard by the power of his spell and its unintentionally violent result.

The shock of accidentally smashing his professor into the roof made his concentration slip.

Qmort plummeted to the ground, landing in a bloodied heap with a dull, wet sounding thud. He gave a final, rasping and gurgling cough, and then lay still.

Slowly a dark cloud of something vaporous began leaking from the non-moving body, forming a ghostly shape above it.

"Oh no you don't," said Harry, reaching deep into one of his magically expanded pockets.

His injured arm burnt like it was on fire, and the blood was running down it making his hand slippery inside the pocket, so it took

moment or two of fumbling before Harry managed to pull out one of his largest, specially prepared, potion-suspension jars.

"Engorgio," he cast, trying hard but only making the neck and top of the jar huge, much like his failed efforts at enlarging his robes.

The black cloud separated from the downed professor and charged at him just as he pulled the lid off and raised the magical vessel into its path. The ghastly, ghostly thing slid almost totally inside before it could stop.

"Gotcha," said Harry, putting the awkward jar down and slamming the lid, squeezing the last bit of the slippery feeling mist in.

The gas swirled about inside the deformed, blood covered jar angrily, obviously searching for a way out, but the magic imbued in the unbreakable glass stayed firm and the wire latched lid held tight.

Harry looked at it for a moment, wondering if he should wait there with the angry ghost-in-a-bottle, or just leave it behind for whatever professor showed up while he went to the infirmary to get his arm tended to.

He could label it so that they didn't open it, but he somehow doubted a hand written sign saying 'Spirit of the Dark Lord – DO NOT OPEN' was going to get taken seriously, and there was no way he was going to carry it around, or even pick it up to put in his pocket.

Besides, if he didn't bleed to death before somebody came along and found him, he could probably score a ride to the infirmary, which was quite a distance away when you had to walk it under your own power.

Deciding to wait, he slid down the nearby wall to sit on the floor, close but not too close to the impromptu, mutant glass prison, and tore a long strip of material from his already ruined sleeve. As he began bandaging his aching wound, a rather random, happy thought occurred to him.

"I wonder if this means we'll get D.A.D.A as free time now?"

#

Professor Dumbledore looked at the assembled students over his half-moon spectacles.

"And the winner of the House cup is, Hufflepuff!" he announced, confirming what everybody already knew from the obvious differences in the gem levels of the various giant hourglasses.

Loud cheering from the 'Puffs overwhelmed the polite clapping from the other houses.

"Well done, Harry," said Tonks, grabbing the smaller boy in a tight hug that mashed him against her chest in ways Harry found very interesting.

"Eh?" he mumbled.

"Don't you know you won more points than any other 'Puff this year?" she asked.

Harry took a moment to clear his head and considered what she had just said.

It was true he was awarded a lot of points by Whiskers after the thing with Garlic Guy, and he often inadvertently picked up points for helping his classmates, but he thought he had lost a lot more to Greasy over the course of the year than he had gained.

Then again, while being interrogated in the infirmary after the incident, Harry happened to notice the old headmaster was wearing a pair of socks bearing a very distinctive gold monogram on them.

"Oh well," he thought. Whatever the reason, he might as well enjoy it, rather than spend valuable energy trying to work it out.

With that, he smiled, grabbed Tonks, and hugged her again - tightly.

#

Harry stood on the Hogsmeade train platform, precious new Hagrid-provided photo album filled with photos of his parents cradled carefully in his arms.

A mixed expression of total and complete horror, panic, and anger twisted his face.

In one hand he held a slightly crumpled note, given to him just seconds ago by a smirking prefect.

"What, in the name of Merlin's crystal balls, do they mean by 'Not allowed to use magic over the holidays'?"

Finite.

AN:

If you think this fic should have been more serious, was too much/not enough of a crack-fic, or if you wanted me to have written a huge epic with totally original plot and characters, sorry. It is meant to be just a fun, light hearted, canon-like redo with a Harry I've not really seen before.

Hopefully it brought a smile or two to your face, since that's all I wanted it to do.

Appologies to Heinlein and Pratchett as necessary. :)